



THE
OUTLOOK
on

NEFA

THE OUTLOOK ON N.E.F.A.

Compiled by

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ASAM SAHITYA SABHA

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FOREWORD

We offer a most cordial welcome to the distinguished delegates and visitors who are assembled at Pragjyotishpur on the occasion of the 63rd Session of the Indian National Congress.

Assam's case often goes by default because of utter lack of publicity outside the frontiers of the State. And the region known as N.E.F.A. which forms an integral part of the Eastern Frontier of India presents a case for sober analysis in its relation to Assam. The book is an humble attempt to acquaint and enlighten our guests about the different aspects of N.E.F.A. *vis-a-vis* Assam.

We seize this opportunity of expressing our gratefulness to the Reception Committee of the Gauhati Congress Session and the Government of Assam but for whose liberal financial assistance, the publication of this book could not have been possible. Mention must also be made of Sri Premadhar Rajkhowa who took the trouble of arranging its publication at Calcutta within a very limited period.

We shall deem our efforts amply rewarded if this book succeeds in focussing attention from people of lead and light to a vital problem that confronts this area.

Sibsagar, Assam,
The 6th January, 1958

PARAG CHALIHA
General Secretary,
ASAM SAHITYA SABHA.

PREFACE

Assam is a closed book for the rest of India, more so is the N.E.F.A. In the following pages we have tried to evaluate some aspects of the N.E.F.A. people and their culture. Because of our time-old historical, cultural and geographical relations, we of the Assam plains claim to know them better, inspite of the Iron Curtain instituted by the Administration.

Since time immemorial, the people of the N.E.F.A. areas have been living in close proximity and good neighbourliness with the people of the Assam Valley in a spirit of comradeship and a synthesis has steadily developed among these peoples. It is interesting to note that even during the time of the British, not only was this happy relationship maintained, but history bears ample testimony to its being steadily developed and stabilised. But for this happy position, we are afraid, peaceful existence of this part of the country would have been imperilled.

Language is always an important, if not the vital, medium for evolving such a synthesis and particularly in the matter of Assam and the N.E.F.A., this has always been the case, in as much as the hill brethren, in their commercial and other intercourses with the plains people, have been using the language of the plains people as their medium. In course of this process of intercourse, both sides borrowed freely from each other and as the texture of the Assamese vocabulary will point out, distinctive tribal forms, varied aspects of syntex etc. have considerably enriched the stock of Assamese words. It is not only so, but, as will be evident by a casual visit to any part of N.E.F.A., Assamese has been the *lingua franca* among the different tribal groups. It will not be out of place to mention here that in the discourses and reports of the momentous Naga Convention held at Kohima last year, Assamese was necessarily used as a medium. Even while giving lessons in Hindi in the N.E.F.A. areas, teachers have got to use Assamese.

We are sorry, however, to disclose, that there has been systematic propaganda from interested quarters in the rest of India against the Assamese people in relation to our Hill

brethren. These propagandists try to create impressions about strong prejudices and suspicions of the tribal people against the people of the plains. But they conventionally forget that by the term "people of the plains" it does not necessarily mean the Assamese. If there are prejudices, they would relate to every people of the plains, whether they belong to Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Bengal or the Punjab or any other part of India. This attitude, however, cuts at the very root of India's fundamental unity, and colouring Assam as the sole target of prejudice and suspicion, tends only to vitiate the whole atmosphere. The nefarious design behind all these moves is not difficult to understand. It is calculated to isolate the Assamese people from the love and affection of our tribal brethren, which have been fostered and stabilised by age-old traditions and instil in their place outsiders,—who do not belong to the State—so that they might rule unhampered and reap the harvest. As far as we know, our tribal brethren have implicit faith and good-will on the Assamese people and the Assamese people in return preserve in them the same spirit of cordiality and esteem. This is often misunderstood by outsiders and the brown bureaucrats at the helm of affairs of the N.E.F.A. They do not know what poisonous seeds they are sowing by their unimaginative policies in the hill areas. It is not by dividing the hills people from the people of the plains but by weaving the two into a consolidated pattern of friendship and mutual respect that national cohesion may be achieved.

History points clearly to the fact that this part of India has ever remained as a single, autonomous, compact, unit and surprisingly enough, Nature herself has bestowed her blessings in fostering it up and strengthening this bond. It is interesting to note that in history there are numerous instances of these tribal people presenting united stand against invaders. Piyoli Phookan, one of India's earliest fighters for Freedom, had in his rebellious army a good number of Singfows, Khamptis, Nagas etc. Mahabir Lachit Barphookan's victorious army consisted of good many tribal people.

Holding as it does, the strategic position of a defence frontier of India, this area must, of necessity, be treated as a consolidated unit and the Constitution itself, in view of all these, has provided for ultimate integration of N.E.F.A. with Assam.

We are constrained, however, to note that instead of building up this natural process of integration, the N.E.F.A. administration, for the last few years or so, has been following a policy of isolation and disintegration by seeking to eliminate Assamese from its age-old position of medium of synthesis. Peaceful co-existence is, to-day, our watchword. We talk so much about amity, talk vociferously about uniting the hills and the plains. But here, in this North East Frontier of India, all these high ideals are thrown away to the winds. Of course, the Administration here, manoeuvres (in papers) of building up an Indian synthesis, and a True Indian Patriotic Outlook. This Indianisation has been tried to be built up with one foot in the hills and the other straight at Delhi. Of course this is an absurdity. The natural neighbours of Assam appear to have been ousted, their age-old traditions and links—linguistic, cultural, geographical, social etc. have been sought to be sealed up. An Indian outlook has been fostered by installing anti-Assamese feelings. Amity is proposed to be established from what is called a position of strength.

We must not be foolish enough to grudge a proper propagation of our National Language i.e. Hindi. Nor must we grudge the development of the different tribal tongues. But we find it hard to reconcile that by ousting a language from its age-old position, as Assamese has been, the National Language should be thrust upon a people, who, naturally, as also of necessity, have been conversant with that language i.e. Assamese. And it is in the interest of the tribal people themselves that their link with India lies always through Assam and the language of Assam cannot but be their medium to build the edifice of synthesis, fellowship, homogeneity and national solidarity.

Sometimes it is manoeuvred to be contended that the tribal people of the N.E.F.A. have not raised protests against the present arrangement of imposition of Hindi in preference to Assamese. And sometimes it so happens that representations, supporting this arrangement are projected to be made by tribals, dressed up by the Administration. It should be borne in mind that the tribal people of this area are still backward and in a state of illiteracy—the nemesis of 150 years of British domination—and it would be idle to expect them to be quite vocal or to venture to revolt against the Administration's policies or

actions. But would it be proper to exploit their simplicity? Even so, it is significant to note that protests have been made by the tribal people on several occasions against this superimposition of Hindi and urging retention of Assamese as the medium of instruction and well-merited memoranda over the issue submitted to the Authorities with little or no response so far.

If it is the avowed policy of the Union Government to help and foster the growth and development of regional languages and refrain from imposing Hindi at the sacrifice of the interests of the latter, we fail to understand why Hindi has been made the medium of instruction in the N.E.F.A. in preference to Assamese. We say all this, not because we love Hindi less, but because we love Assamese more, not for sentimental or parochial considerations, but from higher consideration of unity, fraternity and political expediency. This does not, however, mean that we object to the tribal languages being made, wherever possible, the media of instruction. Far from it. But in that case, Assamese, as the virtual regional language of the area, should on all accounts, be made a compulsory second language and Hindi as the National Language, should be taught as an optional or additional subject, as has been done everywhere else.

The most unfortunate aspect of the whole matter is that whenever a voice is raised against downright denial and utter disregard for Assam's natural, just and legitimate claims, more often than not, it is conveniently though sadistically, interpreted as a measure of parochialism, provincialism or what is called linguistic imperialism! Issues such as the one referred above, are therefore, made delicate and the call for a sober analysis never to be brushed aside by superficial observations or pious sermons. Fortunately for Assam, the economic backwardness of its people has, of late, warranted sympathy from the rest of India. One has only to see to gauge and believe the utter helplessness and desperation of the Assamese people, particularly in the economic field. Without going into details, a reference to an article by Shri Sri Prakasa, a revered ex-Governor of the State, will be sufficient to justify our contention: "Then the people of Marwar have gone there; and in their hand entirely is the internal trade of the place. Practically, the whole of the labour on the Tea estates, in the factories and on the roads,

comes from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The administrative set-up largely consists of persons recruited from Bengal. The army and the police are monopolized by the Gurkha, skilled work is in the hands of the Punjabi, and the river traffic in those of the East Pakistani." It will therefore be nothing short of sheer foolhardiness to dub these people parochial, let alone linguistic imperialists !

We therefore, hold and hold strongly, that the N.E.F.A. administrators have formulated and followed short-sighted policies, particularly in the educational (and linguistic) spheres and if they are allowed to continue likewise, more harm will be done to an otherwise righteous cause. They must be made to see things in their correct perspective and remodel the Administration's policies in the light of events and suggestions that the different articles of the book reveal. If this book serves to focuss the attention of all righteous persons in the country and bring realisation to those, who frame the policies of the N.E.F.A. administration, we shall consider our efforts adequately rewarded.

I take this opportunity of expressing my profound gratitude to all those who, in various ways, have helped me in compiling and editing the book . Particular mention must be made of the Editors of Natun Asamiya, Assam Tribune, Asamiya and Janambhoomi, for their courtesy in allowing reproduction of various matters published in their issues as also of Principal Hem Barua, Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami, Dr. Maheswar Neog, Sri Benudhar Sarmah, Sri Atul Chandra Hazarika and Sri Padmadhar Chaliha for their co-operation in various ways. Greatful thanks are also due to all the contributors, who readily helped me with their articles and to the Publicity Officer of the N.E.F.A. for kindly furnishing me with a note on the Land and People of the Agency as also the photographs for incorporation in this book. I owe a good deal to Sri Lila Gogoi, who helped me all through in the compilation. A student of mine, Hassan Md. Wazir Ali rendered valuable assistance by translating some of the articles. So did Sri Manick Borgohain, a friend of mine. I thank both Gohain and Hassan. I am particularly indebted to Sri Premadhar Rajkhowa, who, at a great personal loss and inconvenience, arranged and supervised the publication of the book in Calcutta, Sri Padma Barkataki as

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also Sri Kalicharan Pal of the Nabajiban Press deserve my thanks for the personal care they took in bringing out the book within a very limited period. Due to the hurried nature of printing, omissions and commissions are sure to creep in and for all this I crave indulgence of the readers and pray for pardon.

Sibsagar (Assam),

PARAG CHALIHA.

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AN IDU MISHMI GIRL FROM LOHIT.

By kind courtesy of the Publicity Department, N.E.F.A.

LAND AND PEOPLE

THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY covers an area of roughly 33,000 square miles of wild mountainous country spread like a giant horse-shoe between the Himalayas to the North and the Brahmaputra Valley to the South. It adjoins the international boundaries of Burma on the East, of the Tibet region of China in the North and the East and of Bhutan on the West.

The Agency area presents a remarkable topographical variety: there are thick, sub-tropical undergrowth jungles near the foothills, with hills further North presenting every possible type of mountain scenery. There is the 14,000 feet Se-La Pass on the way to Tawang with masses of rhododendrons and other multi-coloured flowers; the lovely valleys of Siang with their background of snow-capped mountains and passes which get snow-blocked during winter; the formidable slopes of the Patkoi on the Eastern side of Tuensang and Tirap. About 15,000 square miles of the total area are estimated to be under forest. The entire area is intersected by rivers, big and small, numbering about 50.

The Agency abounds in valuable flora and fauna. The fauna is well varied but no species occur in any great number except possibly wild elephant, buffalo and tiger. Sambhur, hogdeer and barking deer are also found. A mithun, which is something of a cross between a cow and a buffalo, is however, prized most and is the chief standard of wealth and barter.

The monsoon sets in from the month of April and continues up to the month of October. During the monsoon, rainfall is heavy. An exception to this is the Monpa-Sherdukper area which gets a very low rainfall compared to other areas.

TRIBES

This area is the home of at least some 25 distinct tribes, who, while they present an extraordinary divergence of culture,

language, dress and custom, have a compelling likeness in certain other major respects such as agricultural techniques, housing, lack of an indigenous script (with one or two exceptions), attitude to and practice of human cure, a tendency to remain isolated and seek security in clan and tribal compositions.

In Western Kameng there are the Monpas (34,000) a gentle, courteous people who cultivate on terraces, maintain large numbers of cattle, sheep and horses, and are deeply influenced by Buddhist ideals. They also make lovely colourful carpets, delicately painted wooden vessels and on ceremonial occasions wear long and colourful brocade costumes and head-gears. In the East of the same Division is a large population of Daflas, (50,000) here called Bangnis, some of whom have only recently been brought under administration.

The wild and desolate hills of Subansiri are inhabited by Tagins (3,000) and in the North from the Sipi River to the Agle Mara by a tribe which for want of a better name is usually called the Hill Miri (3,000) and by another group of Daflas (66,00).

The life of the people in the Northern and Western mountains, where puny man battles against the giant forces of nature, is in striking contrast to that of the Apa Tanis (9,000) on their beautiful plateau, where nature has been largely dominated and controlled by tribal genius.

Siang is the home of bright colours, lovely weaving, dancing, singing and an attractive people known formerly by the somewhat derogatory name 'Abor'; they now call themselves Adi or 'hillman' (69,000). Here too are striking contrasts. On one side is Pasighat, established in 1911 and now a prosperous little township, where quite a number of the people are educated. On the other, are the remote valleys to the North, inhabited by Membas, (600) Pailibos (800), Ramos (1,000), Bokars, Boris (1,200) and many other groups of whom still comparatively little is known.

In Lohit, we find the three main groups of Mishmis—the Idus (20,000) who cut their hair short, the Taraons (Digarus) (11,000) and Kamans (Mijus) (14,000) who let it grow. The Digaru and Miju women possess great physical beauty; they wear attractive cloth woven by themselves and dress their hair in a coiffure that would not disgrace a Parisian lady of fashion. They are distinguished from most other tribal groups by the

fact that the unit of social organisation is the house rather than the village.

Also, in Lohit, are the numerically smaller groups of Khamptis (5,500) and Singphos (2,450), as well as a number of Padams, (3,500). The Agency's Member of Parliament, Shri Choukham Gohain, is a Khampti, a Buddhist tribe, and the only one in the Agency to have a script of its own, which resembles Tai.

In Tirap are the virile and picturesque Wanchos (20,000), allied to the Konyaks who are organized under influential and wealthy Chiefs; the Noctes, (12,600), who have adopted a very elementary form of Vaishnavism and have been more in contact with the outside world than any others; the many small groups collectively known as Tangsa, a charming friendly people who have migrated from Burma and still retain the influence of Burmese dress, and small populations of Singphows and Khamptis.

Tuensang is mainly populated by tribal groups to which the rather meaningless word 'Naga' has been applied by the people of the plains. Tuensang is the home of at least seven groups, Chang (15,000), Konyak (45,000), Sangtam (20,000), Yimchungrr (28,000), Khiemungan, Sema (14,000), and Phom (10,000). All of these indulged in head-hunting in the past and this has tended to obscure in public opinion their other virtues. There is a certain splendour about their life; their villages, invariably on the tops of hills, are planned on a grand scale; their houses are often large and the pillars of their Morungs (communal houses) are elaborately carved. Their material culture is one of the riches in the Agency. They have a remarkable sense of colour which is expressed in the weaving of beautifully designed cloth. They are expert wood-carvers and make toys, human figures, drinking mugs and other objects. They are clever workers in iron and some of them have the art of pottery.

RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

The religious systems of NEFA have five qualities which, in so far as it is possible to measure these things at all, are of fundamental value.

Apart from the Buddhist tribes in the Kameng Frontier Division and parts of Siang and Lohit, there is a very general belief in a Supreme God who is just, benevolent and good. For

example, Doini-Pollo, the Sun-Moon God of all the Adi groups, is regarded as the great witness in the sky the upholder of truth. He is the unifying force behind popular religion from the Siang to the Upper Kamla and perhaps beyond.

Similar notions are held by other tribal groups, though sometimes we find, as in Wancho and Konyak thought that the benevolent Sky-god is opposed by a malevolent Earth-god. Earthquakes are caused by the titanic wars between them.

One more example may be given. Chungba-Sangyat seems to be a pre-Buddhist deity who is still worshipped by the Sherdukpens who have developed an interesting synthesis of Buddhist and tribal ideas.

Beneath these mighty rulers of the unseen world, there is a host of demons and furies who prey upon mankind.

The NEFA tribes have their own philosophy of religion even though it is expressed in poetic or metaphorical form. In them, we find a strong sense of history, a pride in the descent of the race from a great ancestor, the record of heroic deeds and, most interestingly, traces of a belief in the value of supreme self-sacrifice for the good of mankind.

Their religion is associated with a social ethic that unites them in their discipline and undoubtedly makes for a certain nobility of conduct.

In their religion, they have created a realistic picture of life seen *sub-specie eternitatis*; they face it, in all its dismal trap-pings, with courage; but it is not fear of things as they are, but a courageous appreciation of them which has brought it into being. Thus, their religion gives them the power 'to reconcile themselves to the eternal emergencies of life.'

Above all, they have faced the problem of death; They have devised means whereby it can be made more tolerable. The lengthy course of funerary ceremonies, the elaborate tombs, the carvings, the feasts of mourning are not due only to a desire to propitiate the ghost but give the mourners an opportunity of separating themselves psychologically from the departed object, always a protracted and painful process.

They believe in a life after death and that living and dead continue to be united in one family.*

* This note is prepared through the esteemed co-operation and courtesy of the Publicity Officer, N.E.F.A.

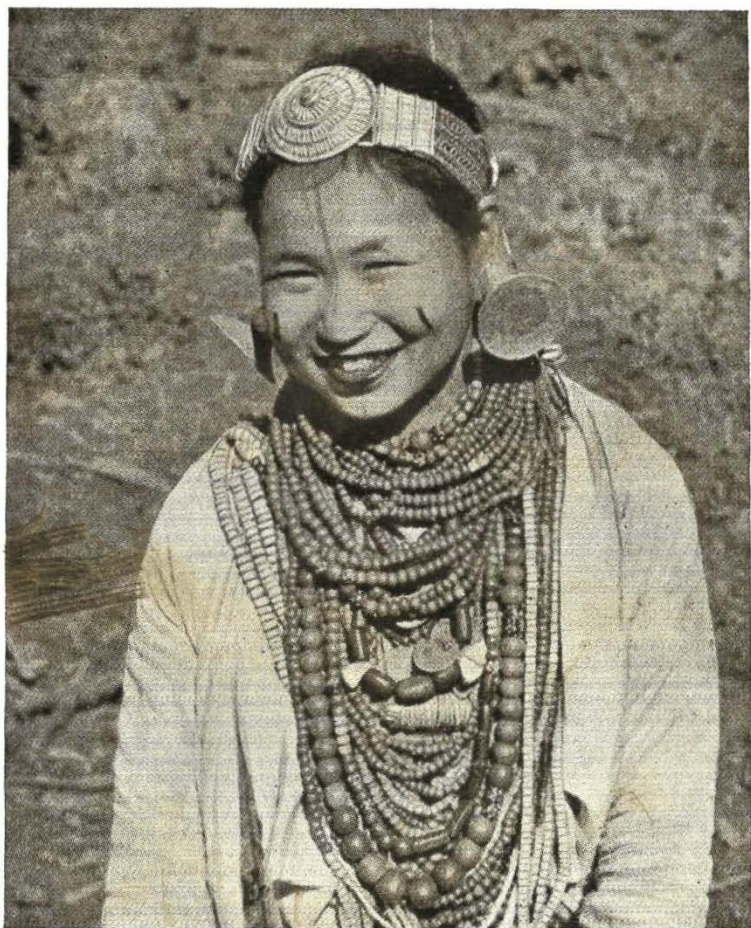


MISHMI DANCERS.



AN ADI DANCE.

By kind courtesy of the Publicity Department, N.E.F.A.



AN AKA GIRL FROM KAMENG FRONTIER DIVISION.

By kind courtesy of the Publicity Department, N.E.F.A.



A DAFLA GROUP FROM SUBANSIRI FRONTIER DIVISION.



KHAMPTIS FROM LOHIT FRONTIER DIVISION.

By kind courtesy of the Publicity Department, N.E.F.A.

AHOM RELATIONS WITH THE NEIGHBOURING HILL TRIBES AND THE TRIBUTARY CHIEFS

U. N. Gohain (Late)

Although the Purganna system prevailed in Kamrup and the Khel system in Upper Assam, there were many exceptions to the extension of either system due to the heterogenous nature of the people composed of many tribes in different stages of civilisation and to the pressure of the neighbouring mountainous tribes, who used to harass the Ahom rulers from time to time.

THE BHUTANESE

Along the base of the Bhutan Hills and sloping downwards to the plains, there stretches, from Darrang westwards, a narrow tract of fertile land varying in breadth from 10 to 20 miles, where cotton, rice and other staples were grown. The strip was divided off into a series of passes known as Duars (doors). Along the frontier of Bhutan proper there were 18 of these Duars, 11 on the frontier of Bengal and Koch Behar (including Goalpara), and with an area of sixteen hundred sq. miles, in the north of Kamrup and Darrang. The former had been annexed by the Bhutanese long before the British came into possession of Bengal, but the latter were held by the Ahoms until the troublous reign of King Gaurinath Singh when these were surrendered to the Bhutan Government in consideration of an annual tribute of yak-tails, ponies, musk, gold-dust, blankets and knives, of an estimated value of (Naraini) Rupees 4785·1. It was agreed that, so long as this was paid the Kamrup Duars were to remain permanently with the Bhutanese, while

those in Darrang were to be managed jointly, the Ahoms holding them from July to November, and the Bhutanese for the remaining months of the year. Of the seven Assam Duars those falling in Kamrup are known as Bijni, Chappakhamar, Chappaguri, Baska and Ghaukolla, while those falling in Darrang are known as Kalling and Buriguma.

THE AKAS, DAFLAS, ABORS AND MIRIS

In order to stop the acts of oppression committed by the Akas (Ankas), the Daflas, the Abors and the Miris, the Ahom Government made them to pay a nominal tribute, and, in return, they were granted the right of *posa* i.e., certain sets of paiks were assigned to them and made liable to pay them, instead of to the State, their annual contribution.

MACKENZIE

"According to the records of 1825", says Mackenzie, "it would seem that the Hazari-khowas were entitled to receive from each house of their allotted Khels one portion of a female dress, one bundle of cotton thread, and one cotton handkerchief.

"From an account bearing date, 13.5.1825 it appears that the Daflas were entitled to receive, from every ten houses, one double cloth, one single cloth, one handkerchief, one dao, ten heads of horned cattle and four seers of salt."

"The Hill Miris, commanding by their position the cultivated tracts of Bordoloni, Sisi and Dhemaji, had acquired an acknowledged right to *posa* similar to that asserted by the Daflas, Akas and Bhutias. So far as can be gathered, the Abors, through much more powerful than any of these tribes, had no such rights. Rights, however, they had of some kind, which were even more difficult to settle than those arising out of the *posa*."

"The Abors claimed an absolute sovereignty over the Miris of the plains, and an inalienable right to all the fish and gold found in the Dihong river. The Miris for many years acknowledged the Abors as their masters. They were ready to accept their position of go-betweens of the rude hillmen and the Assamese traders. It was on the whole a profitable one, and

the more so while unsettled state of Assam under the Native Government also, anxious to conciliate their highland neighbours, had long since relieved the Miris of all revenue charges, acknowledging thereby the subjection of that tribe to the Abors, whose interpreters they were officially recognised to be.

"Besides asserting their sovereignty over the Miris, the Abors claimed, as above stated, a right to all the fish and gold found in the streams that flowed from their hills. In the islands of the Brahmaputra, and along the lower courses of its northern feeders, were numerous villages of Hindu gold washers and fishermen called Beeahs or Beheeahs (The Beheeahs are of the same family as the Chutias—Dalton), who had perhaps themselves originally been driven from the hills by the Abor-Miri advance. In the pursuit of their avocation, these Beeahs were wont to frequent the Dihong, Dibong and other tributaries of the Brahmaputra and from them the Abors were always in the habit of receiving, if not regular blackmail, atleast frequent conciliatory offerings and acknowledgments of superiority. The Assam Government which derived no small portion of its revenue from the gold-dust of the rivers, had an interest in keeping stationery these Beeah settlements, even when the occupation of gold washing became much less remunerative than it once had been. Under the British rule the Beeahs became their own masters; and many of them like the Miris, moved lower down the valley."

In 1847 Captain Vetch went to the hills with a small party of troops to demand the restoration of a body of Kachari gold-washers or Sonwals carried off by the Abors.

Since the reign of Susengpha alias Pratap Sing (1603 to 1641 A.D.) Katakis used to be appointed to watch the Miris and Daflas and to keep the authorities informed of their movements. In 1655 King Sutamla alias Jayadhvaj Singh forced the Miris to agree to pay an annual tribute of bison, ponies, tortoises, swords and yellow beads (probably amber). According to the Muhammadan account, the hill tribes paid no tribute, but most of them "regarded the Ahoms with awe, and generally submitted to their orders." "Of them," wrote Muhammad Kasim in the days of Aurengzeb, "the Daflas are entirely independent of the Assam Raja and plunder the country contiguous to their mountains whenever they find an opportunity."

THE SINGPHOS

"Twelve of the Singpho Chiefs," says David Scott, "were also nominally subject to Assam, but did not pay tribute."

THE NAGAS

"From the Tirap river eastward to the Patkoi," says the Report on the Administration of Assam, 1901-02, "the Nagas are completely in subjection to the Singphos, and are apparently a very quiet race. West of this point begins a succession of groups of villages known to the Assamese by the names of passes or Duars through which their inhabitants resort to the plains,—as the Namsangias, Borduarias, Paniduarias, Mithonias, Banpheras, Jobokas, Bhitara Namsangias, Jaktungias Tublungias, Assiringias, etc. The outer tribes of this region are in constant communication with the plains and, in the times of the Assam Rajas, used to make annual offerings of elephant tusks and other such articles (bison, red hair, red cane, salt, etc.). They do a considerable trade in cotton and other hill produce, and carry back large quantities of salt and rice. The inner tribes, known to the Assamese as Abors or wild-men, are kept from access to the plains by these outer or Bori (subject or civilised) Nagas, who thus keep the carrying trade in their own hands. On this frontier, a system prevails by which the Nagas of each group have allotted to them certain Assamese agents, called Katakis, who manage small plots of revenue-free land, called Nagakhats, on behalf of the tribes. When the attendance of the Chiefs in the hills is required for any purpose they are summoned through Katakis. If satisfaction for robberies and other outrages is not in this way obtained, the Duar or pass, through which the tribe visits the plains, is blocked, and no one is allowed to come down or go up. This system has rarely failed to secure reparation."

These Katakis were paid by a remission of the poll-tax; and, under the British revenue system, they received a remission on their land equal to the amount of the old remission of poll-tax. Some of the Katakis managed also the khats or grants held by different Naga Chiefs on the plains. The total number of Katakis in Sibsagar was eighty eight.

"Under the Assam Government," wrote Captain Brodie in 1841, "it was usual for most of the chiefs to come down once

a year and render a kind of submission to the king. Slaves, elephant teeth, spear shafts, clothes, cotton, etc., were presented, and the Nagas in their turn received presents of various kinds on their dismissal."

MANUFACTURE OF SALT

"Purandar Singh," says Alexander Mackenzie, "is known to have asserted successfully his right to share with the Nagas the produce of the salt manufactured in the lower hills. The hill Chiefs, when the Native Government was strong, came down annually bringing gifts, that may perhaps have been considered to be tribute. It has, in fact been conjectured that the inhabitants of this tract are descended from settlements of hill mercenaries of various tribes planted here by the ancient Ahom kings, and the variety of the tribal dialects is adduced to support this theory. However that may be, it is certain that several of the Chiefs had received grants of khats or lands and of bheels or fishing waters on the plains and enjoyed assignments of paiks like the ordinary Assamese nobility.

"From the records of 1840 it appears that the Nagas living near Jeypore, the Namsang, Pani Dwar, and Bor Dwar Nagas, lived chiefly by manufacturing salt, which they retailed to the people of the plains. There were in the low hills 85 salt wells in all, of which the Government was allowed to be absolute owner of only three, enjoying merely a right to a certain number of flues or fire-places at each of the others. These rights Purandar Singh had regularly asserted".

THE MIKIRS

The Mikirs, according to Dalton, were originally settled in the North Cachar Hills but were driven westward into Jaintia territory by the Kacharis. Dissatisfied with the treatment accorded to them there, they again migrated to their present site—the hilly portion of the Nowgong district and Golaghat sub-division between the Jamuna and the Dhansiri. The Assam kings claimed their principal allegiance, appointed their Chiefs, and took a tribute in cotton, mats, etc., valued at about Rs. 300. The Mikirs received permission from the Ahom monarchy to cultivate a strip of land under the hills, and an assignment of the proceeds of certain fisheries and ferries. These they farmed

out, and they received rent in the shape of dried fish and rice when they brought down their tribute.

THE KHASIS

From the Report on the Administration of Assam, 1892-93, it appears that the chiefs of the Khasi States on the northern border of the hills had gradually, since the decay of the Ahom power in the year 1794, established themselves in the plains of Kamrup in the tracts known as Duars, and were accustomed to pay only a nominal allegiance to the Assam kings.

THE TRIBUTARY CHIEFS OF DARRANG DIMARUA, ETC.

The ruling chiefs, who had made their submission to the Ahoms, were transformed into governors acting on their behalf. "To this category," says Gait, "belonged the Rajas of Darrang, Dimarua, Rani, Barduar, Nauduar and Beltola. They administered justice and collected the revenues in their own districts. but an appeal lay from their orders to the Bar Phukan and the monarch ; those of them who had territory in the hills, however, were practically independent in that portion of their dominions. They were required to attend on the king in person with thier prescribed contingent of men, when called upon to do so, and, in addition, all except the Raja or Rani paid an annual tribute. Their office was hereditary, but they were liable to dismissal for misconduct."

Allen in his Gazetteer of Kamrup district says:—" On the southern frontier of Kamrup there were various minor Chiefs, whose position was not unlike that enjoyed by the Siems in the Khasi Hills at the present day. They exercised judicial powers in petty cases, and were bound to supply the Ahoms with paiks, or money in their place and to attend with a contingent in times of war. The head-quarters of these Chiefs, many of whom were of Garo birth, were situated at Borduar, Bholagram, Mairapur, Lukhiduar, Pantan, Bongram, Vagaduar, Beltola, Dumoriya and Rani." "Each of them," says Wade, "performed Khewa (prostration) before the Monarch."

An ambassador from the western provinces could not be received by the Sovereign unless he was entrusted with a separate address to the Bar Phukan and each of the Patra Mantrees. In every instance the Bar Phukan detained the ambassador at

Gauhati until an order should arrive from Rangpur directing the latter to proceed to the capital. "It is the custom at court," says Wade, "that the Burro Burrowah should supply provisions to ambassadors on the first day of their arrival, three Gohaigns on three successive days and all the four ministers during the four ensuing days. In this interval the ambassador is received by the ministers, but not admitted to an audience until the expiration of that period. From this time the Monarch supplies their provisions from the Rajahat."

* Reproduced from his Book, "Assam under the Ahoms."

THE AGE-OLD AMITY OF THE HILLS AND THE PLAINS

Sri Lila Gogoi

The hills and the plains of Assam are not separate identities. It was through the joint endeavour of the hills and the plains that the edifice of the culture, history and heritage of Assam was constituted. Before the advent of the British, except its positional distinction there was no difference whatsoever in the social and cultural field between the hills and the plains people. There existed an unbreakable friendship with the tribes that surround the boundaries of Assam *i.e.*, the Nagas, the Mishmis, the Chingphows, the Abars, the Daflas, the Akas the Bhootanese, the Garos, the Mikirs and the Jayantias. Apart from political treaties, there had been marital relations and this brought about a happy and natural synthethis.

The Ahoms ruled over Assam for six hundred years from the second decade of the 13th century to the 3rd of the 19th. During this period the political and cultural attainment of Assam reached the highest peak of glory and during this period, more particularly, an ideal relationship grew and developed between people of the hills and those of the plains of Assam.

Among the Ahoms was prevalent a custom of adoption of children of other castes, particularly tribals. Whenever any promising child was seen among the tribes, he was brought up into their caste and adopted. There are instances of such adopted children attaining positions as high as the Barphukanship and Barbaruahship.

"There was a Barahi boy in the Barpatar clan named Lahar. He became the Neog of Chowrak clan. He was childless. A Naga boy of Banfrang (Banfera) was therefore, brought and adopted. After the death of Lahar, this Naga boy was ap-

pointed as Bara of Likchau. Being highly impressed, the king appointed him Barphukon in place of Langi Phukon (1631 A.D.)¹ This Barphukon later became known as Neog Gohain Barphukon.

History bears evidence to the fact that such high personages as Obhoipuria Rajkhowa, Salaguria Rajkhowa, Ghora Konwer Barbaruah, Maupia Naobaicha Phukan, Deka Phukan, Moupia Kaliabaria Phukan, Dikhow Mukhia Rajkhowa, etc. were originally Naga children adopted as above.

In the past, all the hills tribes were known as Nagas. Even now the Asamese people in remote villages use the word Naga as a noun and using Kuki, Chingphow, Abor as qualifying adjectives, name the different tribes a Abor Naga, Kuki Naga, Chingphow Naga etc. It is therefore evident that the word as used in the Buranjis embraced people of different tribes.

MARITAL RELATIONS

Marriages of Ahom Kings with the people of the hills were all-together a common feature. "The Dihingia Raja (1497-1531 A.D.) was previously residing in the hills. He had friendly relationship with the Khunbaw of Banpheria Naga. His name was Karengpa. One day he was treated to a feast in his place. The Raja also joined (in the feast). The daughter of Khunbow, Changkun by name had some familiarity with the king's house-hold. After he became King Changkun was made a mistress of the King's house-hold. A son was born to Changkun who later became known as Tyachengmung. Afterwards the King asked his ministers thus: "The boy should find his place between you two Gohains because he come of a Naga mother." The Ministers replied "Be it so. We accept him as such".²

During the reign of Gadadhar Singha (1681-76 A.D.) in course of Tancheng Phukan's expedition towards the Dayang the Naga offered two Naga damsels for betrothal to the Ahom Rajas. The Ahom gave rewards in return.³

During the British regime also an official named Bholanath

¹ An old History of Assam Edited by H. C. Goswami, pp. 39.

² D.H.A.S. M.S. vol. xiv pp. 42.

³ Tunkhungia Buranji by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan.

Parbatia Phukan (Aristocratic Brahmin) married a Chingphow girl and she was taken into their fold with due rituals and a grand feast.¹

During the reign of Pratapshingha the Jayantia King Jasamanika established friendship with the Ahom King with the offer of two Jayantia princesses—one in 1606 A.D. and the other sometime later. The first was escorted by Sondar Gohain through Satgoan and the second by Lai Handiqui through the road of Gobha. After this also, Jasamanika offered another princess and she was escorted by Phul Baruah through Gobha.

During the same reign, King Jasamanika offered in marriage another princess to Jayaditya, son of Pratap Singh in 1606 A.D. The marriage ceremony was celebrated with due solemnity according to Chaklang rites. The "Joron" constituted of four golden bracelets, four pairs of golden ring (two ornamented), three strings of beads worn on the wrist and the neck, one necklace, one pair of Mekhela, one ornamented Riha and these were sent through two Katakis, Debera and Sonabar. And the bride was escorted in a palanquin by Tangu Handiqui and Madan Khowa Chetia. The people coming with the bride were treated to a feast for which the King supplied a thousand puras of rice, ten maunds salt, 20 pots of mustard oil, 20 goats, 20 pigs and 20 pots of wine.

During the reign of King Udayaditya also, Joron with adequate ornaments were sent for the Jayantia princesses. At that time the Jayantia King was given the name of Parbatrai (King of the hill people). Since the Jayantia princesses became Ahom Royal consorts both the sides took Jayantipur and Rangpur as one and treated matters accordingly.

King Rajeswar Singha (1751-69 A.D.) married Kuranganayani daughter of King Jayasingha of Manipur according to full-fledged Chaklang rites and the marriage ceremony covered seven days and nights.

It is not that the Ahom Kings took the daughters of the hills people; there are instances of Ahom princesses given in marriage to the people of the hills. Being benefited by a Naga Khunbaw the Dihingia Raja offered him a princess as a token of gratitude. "Next day the Khunbaw was called in and after

¹ Maniram Dewan by Benudhar Sarma.

he was treated to food and drink, the King said it was you who saved my life. What should I give you? I offer you this lady. Take her."¹

In a later part of the 18th century, during the days of Purananda Buragohain. Rangili Aidew, the aunt of Baram Baruah of Rangachila Duara's dynasty, was given in marriage to a Chingphow Gam, Bichamang with a retinue of maids and servants.

ADOPTION OF TRIBAL CHILDREN.

History bears ample evidence of tribal people being brought into the Ahom-fold and made to enjoy high privileges during the Ahom rule. During the reign of Suhanpha (1488-93 A.D.) Nangchung chased and subjugated five Naga villages. Naga Chief Khana by name, was captured. Khana was brought into the Bargohain fold. During the reign of Burha Raja, Khana's son was made the Bara of Likchau.

In 1521 Phranchengmung Bargohain subjugated the Mahangia Naga village. A son of Khunbaw was taken and seeing his uncle Nangchung childless, he asked the Naga boy to be adopted as a foster child. He was called Chownapam.²

"The Burha Raja brought the daughter of Dauki and Dowching and they were named Dhala Kunwari and Kalia Kunwari. Both were childless and they adopted a Naga of Thowrial clan with great affection."³

"Formerly the Dupgaria Naga presented three boys to the Burha Raja. Their names were Ao, Apam and Lachit. After sometime one died. Lachit was established with landed property at Deroi. He was made Chowdang Baruah. And the King adopted Ao like his own son. He was named Ao Gohain. He was given the access to the Ahom Court by the Ujani Jakhala. The Mahuts and horse-keepers were attributed to him. He was made Ghora-Baruah and he took the name of Ghora-konwar." Later Ghorakonwar became Barbaruah, Barphukan and Bhitorowal Phukan.

It is not that such adoption was confined only to the Nagas.

¹ An old History of Assam by H. C. Goswami, p. 16.

² An old History of Assam by H. C. Goswami, pp. 36.

³ An old History of Assam by H. C. Goswami, pp. 39.

Boys of Garos, Miris and the Mikirs were also taken into the Ahom fold.

"During the reign of Burha Raja Bhekola Gohain was transferred from Baruk and established at Dihing. He was childless. Afterwards a Miri boy was adopted and he was named Miri Handiqui.¹ The tribal people were made Handiqui, one of the seven important dignitaries of the Ahoms. A Garo clan was upgraded to the Ahom aristocracy by being made Chetia. He was named Deka Chetia. A similarly upgraded Mikir clan was named Mikir Hatmuria. People of this clan are still enjoying the privileges like other Ahoms. Due to their abhorrence to the caste-system, the Ahoms were thus the forerunners in unifying the hills and the plains and thus forming a strong and healthy society.

There is a long history of commercial relationship between the hill tribal people and the people of the plains. This relationship was more marked with the Nagas of the Tuensang Division. This was so because a considerable part of the Tuensang area remained within the boundaries of the Ahom kingdom for quite a long time. The Nagas brought 'Jangphai', cotton, salt, ginger, chillis and betle-leaves and from the plains they took rice, paddy and other necessities. Passes (Duar) were therefore opened at Makum, Namchang-Barduar, Dhopabar, Geleki, Dopdar and the Naga traders used to attend the Bazaars at Barhat, Balighat (Bali Bazar), Ramani Bazar (Chantak Bazar) for which they used to pay some kind of duty.

There were trade relations with the Miris, Mishmis the Abors, the Chingphows and the Daflas and strict regulations were enforced. Passes were opened for the Panibatia, Bambatia Miris and the Daflas who come to the plains. Katakis, Chowdanga and Charias were appointed for them. Tanks and Beels were thrown open for fishing by these tribal people and several Hats viz. Phukanar Hat, Owa Hat were established for their trade purposes. In course of their trade trips, the Mishmis used to present to the Kings (Class-wise) javelins, Gandhkalai, and poisons. Moreover the King established twelve Mishmi villages near the Parasuram Kunda. The Ahom king had close fraternal relations with all the tribes that now

¹ An old History of Assam by H. C. Goswami, pp. 43-44.

inhabit the N.E.F.A. There may have been occasional wars with them but treaties of friendship were established immediately. Towards the south the Nagas were favoured with grant of land known as Nagakhat. In the north the Miris, the Dafias and the Abors were awarded paddy and other vegetables each from one pura of land and these are collected by an official known as Parbatia Baruah whose duty was to establish and maintain close relationship with tribals.

It is not generally known that quite a number of the people of the hills ranging from the Tuensang Division to the Mishmi hills got mixed with the aboriginal tribal people. There still exists a number of Ahoms among the Nagas of the Tuensang Division although the long process of environment has made them Nagas. During the Burmese invasion many Assamese took refuge in the Naga villages at the foot of the Naga hills to the south of the Sibsagar Sub-Division and they merged themselves into the Naga fold.

The Chutia people similarly merged into the Mishmi fold. These people were later established at Pachalamukh by Momai Tamuli Barbaruah in course of his census and land reforms. There exists close relationship of the Assamese with even the Chingphows and Bodos and there are similarities in the languages as well. Descendants of former Assamese people merging with the Chingphows are still to be found among the later people in the hills.

A clear idea could be gathered from the following extract, about the way the tribal people looked at the affection and esteem under the patronage of the Ahom king. The Katakis of the Garos and the Mikirs said to the king thus, "We are Garos and Mikirs. We live in the hills. We were like the refuge in the roads and dogs of the streets. And we were treated as outcastes. But now things have totally changed."

In the efforts to drive away the British when Gomdhar Konwar in 1828 and Piyali Phukan in 1830 waged war against the British, the neighbouring hill tribes rendered active support to the rebels with men and material. So it is crystal clear that in times of glory as well as in distress the history of the people of the hills and the plains was intertwined. The society is one, civilization is also the same and the hills and the plains are indivisible.

THE CORE OF THE PROBLEM

Sri Pradeep Das Gupta

As to what should be our approach—the approach of the civilized plains people including the Government of the land—to the tribal population is often discussed in the Press and on platforms. Anthropologists, politicians and administrators as well as other people often tend to impart us knowledge on this delicate subject. Some quote from their text-books on anthropology, some quote from their emotions and intellect, while others transcribe what the formers have quoted.

Notwithstanding the fact that we should really discuss—particularly in Assam where tribals form quite a bulk of the population—this important question of approach to the tribal people, it sometimes occurs to me as if these intellectuals were administering to us some sort of antidotes. As if, we have in our approach some ignoble inclinations, which we should be prevented from.

I am neither a politician nor an administrator, far less an anthropologist. I belong to the common folk, and am not an intellectual. So, my feelings and my thoughts centre round but fundamental or basic themes. And, with these feelings and these thoughts, I find sometimes that what those intellectuals say about the approach are not correct or, if they are correct, are at times contradictory.

ISOLATION

One glaring instance is that while a politician-cum-administrator regrets at “our own lack of initiative” to go to the tribal areas and also laments that apart from this lack of initiative “we were not allowed to go there by the British authorities then in power,” the same honourable gentleman conceives at shutting out some particular tribal areas of Assam from the

people of Assam—or, the entire plains people, for the matter of that. What is the meaning then of the saying that “The need to-day.” I quote our Prime Minister, “is to understand these people, make them understand us and thus create a bond of affection and understanding?”

Sri Nehru, in his speech delivered at the opening session of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas Conference in New Delhi during 1952, remarked : “After the achievement of independence, the basic problem of India, taken as a whole, is one of integration and consolidation.” I wonder, if that bond can be mortared and then cemented by the present policy of the Government of keeping isolated the people of N.E.F.A., for instance, from the people of the adjacent plains. The hill areas, quoted in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of the Indian Republic, are, taken together, supposed to be a constituent part of Assam. Immediately, some of them may have district autonomy and others (N.E.F. Agency) may be administered by the Central Government. But Sri Nehru himself said in his speech at the Shillong Garrison Ground in 1952 that district councils were meant to educate the hills people concerned in modern parliamentary democracy, so that when integrated eventually they could fit in properly with the political and social structure of Assam. About the N.E.F. region, the Prime Minister in 1953 assured the political leaders of Assam that it was the intention of the Government of India to ultimately merge this region with Assam.

Keeping these things in mind, I have failed to understand the real import of the proposal that the Naga Hills district shall be merged with Tuensang Division of N.E.F.A. and put under one administration. Of course, that “one administration” may imply the administration of Assam State. But as this appears to-day, the administration meant in the proposal is more possibly that of N.E.F.A. because, apparently, there has not been any cause so far visible on the surface of N.E.F.A.’s deciding to transfer Tuensang to the State of Assam proper. Rather, in a sense, the disturbed Naga Hills district is now ruled by the Centre. Again, we have not yet forgotten that little more than a year back, the Central Government sponsored the visit to N.E.F.A. areas and the Naga Hills of a selected group of journalists from New Delhi, almost all of whom later

harped on the same tune that the Naga Hills should be put under the Central administration.

IMPOSITION OF HINDI

There is another glaring inconsistency. The N.E.F.A. administration is trying to impose Hindi on the tribal people there in preference to the recognized language of the region, Assamese.

I admit that the N.E.F.A. people, as all the other people of Assam, should learn Hindi which is going to be the State language of India ere long. We are, of course, told that the tribals in the N.E.F.A. are also being imparted education in their own dialects. Even then I often wonder if the Government of India desires to dismantle the north-eastern frontier hills from their present geographical position and transplant them somewhere else in India, beyond the vicinity of Assam. Else, what is the utility of training the people there in Hindi, before they are trained in Assamese?

If the N.E.F.A. people are to get education and be developed economically, politically and otherwise in order that they can be fitted in with the larger social structure of Assam, common people like us think that they should learn Assamese next to their own dialects, and then Hindi—not all of them necessarily, but those who want to learn it. We, the plains people, know our respective mother-tongues. Yet we have to learn Hindi, if we are to mix and communicate with our brethren in other states. Then, again, we have to learn English or other foreign language or languages according to need, if we are to intercourse with the peoples of the world. This is true and implies a real sense. But if besides learning our own mother-tongue, we choose to learn English and deliberately avoid Hindi, then we should either confine ourselves in the coterie of our linguistic kinsmen or kindreds and within the contours of our own religion, or leave India and go where the people speak English. It is an unreal proposition indeed.

Unfortunately, those mealy-mouthed intellectuals, who speak of “psychological integration”, are rivetting their interest on that unreal thing. They denounce the anthropological approach to the tribals which, according to Sri Nehru, means “to insult them”, but at the same time inhibit the scope of psychological approach.

As it is, the core of the problem is that between the two parents one thing that the other is insensible and would corrupt the child and that the child should, therefore, be kept isolated from the "insensible other". This itself is a wrong approach and should be revised.

NEED FOR PROPER PERSPECTIVE

When we speak of separate tribal culture and refer to the "exotic flower" theory, we are apt to forget that India itself is an amalgam of heterogeneous cultural groups. Tribals apart, we have within the borders of our vast country different communities with varied cultures and traditions—such as, Asamiya, Bengalee, Oriya, Telugu, Marathi, Kashmiri and so on. All these various communities form one Indian nation and their culture is one Indian culture. It is not a strange thing, nor something singular and extraordinary in the world. In America, there is no community named American, though there is an American nation composed of diverse ethnic and cultural groups. So is the case in Switzerland and also in Soviet Russia, for instance. However strongly we may deny it, we betray our inclination to treat the hill tribals—particularly, those of the N.E.F.A.—anthropologically, as we plead that they should not come in contact with the plains people and their culture.

DR. S. K. CHATTERJI : PROGRESSIVE ACCULTURATION

"Progressive acculturation, brought about with sympathy", says Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, "was the tacitly accepted policy of Hindu society towards these peoples (aboriginals). This policy was never one of segregation." But for the British policy of isolation which, over a period of more than hundred years, shut out the Assam hill tribals from the plains people, the process of friendship and understanding—already in progress since the days of Bhagadatta—might have further developed by this time. All of us can see it before our eyes, that a close understanding has been possible by the time in the case of many plains tribals. There have been cases of even social integration in some cases, and I do not know if any of the plains tribals of Assam has at any time complained that their integration with the non-tribals has destroyed their distinctive cultures and traditions. And how

has this integration come about? There have been emulations and reciprocal borrowings and their sum total a synthesis.

But that is a different thing. Culture is a mobile theme ; it is a course of civilization. If once upon a time-sime 6,000 years back or even less, according to the book "Volga-se-Ganga" our forefathers were merely food gathering primitives, to-day we live in a scientific era, an era of industrial civilization. Are we not proud of it, or do we lament that we have lost our days of the "Noble Savage"? Yet, culture, like a hill stream, does not progress uniformly everywhere. In the plains, though some of us may claim to have a high culture, we have many of our kinsmen still living, as it were, in the days of yore. It is not at all unnatural in a country, where the facilities of education are so much limited uptil now and where the economy of the bulk of the people is still agricultural.

FAR FROM TRUTH

It is far from truth that the hill tribes of Assam, all of them, are living in an archaic, primitive stage of development. It is not true at least in the case of several hill tribes in the State area of Assam. Because of their close contacts with the plains people prior to the British rule and then as a result of services rendered to them by foreign missionaries, the Khasis, the Mizos, the Nagas, the Garos and the Mikirs have adopted much of semi-Western culture, though not at the cost always of the respective cultures of their own and the respective traditions. The Khasis and Garos, for instance, still maintain their matriarchal social structures. The Nongkrem dance, reflecting a particular event of Nature, is still preserved. The womenfolk of all these tribes, though not all the male members, have retained their traditional costumes.

The N.E.F.A. people, like Rip van Winkle of the school children's text-book, have indeed remained unacquainted with the progress that we the plains people or the other hill tribes have made during the period of their isolation. Except in a portion of the Tuensang Division, the British rulers hardly allowed any Christian missionary to enter into the N. E. F. region. They wanted to keep the people there undisturbed and, subsequently, as a subject for anthropological study. Sir Edward Gait, in accounting for the promulgation of the Inner Lines Regulation,

in 1873, attributed it to "unrestricted intercourse, which formerly led to quarrels and serious disturbances." Also, opening of tea gardens beyond the border line involved Government in quarrel with frontier tribes" They segregated the entire region out of revenge, as "In 1911"—I again quote Sir Edward Gait—"a British officer, Mr. Williamson, and his party were killed by Abors. This gave birth to frontier tracts."

RIP VAN WINKLES

Before we discuss about the approach to the N. E. F. people, it is necessary to see as to at what stage of development these Rip Van Winkles of Free India are now living. While doing so, I must admit that my information is not most up-to-date. But, I do not think that the same shall be found in much variance with the present day facts and figures, as the progress of work in N. E. F. A. is necessarily slow and circumspective.

Contained in an area of about 35,000 square miles under varying altitudes, the population of N. E. F. A. estimated in 1952 at between eight and nine lakhs. The land resembling the colourfulness of a blooming girl, still remains virgin. The people living in the accessible strips, neighbouring Assam districts, know something of civilization, while in the interior there are people who have no sense of even *raiment*.

The former group sometimes come down to the plains for trade and have thus learnt the use of money. Above the hills and in interior regions, the people use the barter system. They exchange the excess of their food or handicrafts with materials which others can offer and they require. Thus, the Apa Tanis of Ziro procure salt and cotton from their Dafla neighbours in exchange of paddy or millet, which they produce in abundance. The Daflas, though they live beside the Apa Tanis in the Subansiri area, are not far from the Lakhimpur district of Assam. While they themselves produce cotton they procure salt from North Lakhimpur for their own use and for trade. The system of middlemanship in trade is also practised, it is stated, by some tribals in the lower reach. In the interior, where people's needs are still more limited and the produces are generally common, the concept of trade remains wholly unknown. Nature supplies all they need or at least provides them with the materials to model the required substances.

CLANNISH TRAITS

The human beings, as a rule, love to live in society, and the N. E. F. A. people have a particular fascination for this. Then, again, they have an inordinate fear for people outside their particular group.

Different clans use different dialects, as is the case, however, with Daflas and Apa Tanis in Subansiri. Yet, curiously, almost all the dialects belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and one or two to the Tai group of the Indo-Chinese languages. This, however, points to the possible origin of the N. E. F. A. tribes.

There is no record of these tribes' itinerary from their original homeland, nor anything to show that these tribes are the original denizens of India's *intractable* north-eastern hills. Nevertheless, with the currents of time sections of these people came in contact with different neighbouring peoples and were to some extent acculturated by the latter.

I have already pointed to their previous relations with the plains people of Assam, some of whom in the 19th century had even merged themselves with the N. E. F. A. people according to the historians of Assam. It seems, some of these tribals had contacts with the Tibetans also. The Monpa and the Khamti tribes in Kameng Division have Buddhist temples in all their villages, besides a few monasteries and nunneries in the whole division. These tribes never offer animal sacrifice to their gods and their oblation comprises flowers, rice, etc. These people have also, even to-day, trade relations with the Tibetans.

FOREIGN IMPACT

The Tibetan relation with the north-eastern tribes can also be traced in the nomenclature of Ziro, headquarters of the Subansiri Division. It is said that some hundred of years back seven Tibetan families of the Ziro clan came to live in this plateau. They ruled over the Apa Tanis for a few generations, oppressed and exploited them until the Apa Tanis rose to one man and eliminated the Ziro families.

Even the names of different hills and different people of the region point to some foreign impacts. "Abor" is an Assamese word, meaning "intractable." Similarly, there is no tribe named "Mishmi" and the Mishmi Hills' population actually consists of Digaru, Padam, Singpho and Miju (Doammai).

The Akas of Kameng call themselves "Hrusso" and the name of the Khowas is "Bugun". Subarna Sree or "Subansiri" region, which is the source of the "Subarna Sree" river that joins the Brahmaputra in the Lakhimpur district obviously, borrows its name from the plains people.

Foreign impact is discernible also in the faiths and customs of the N. E. F. A. people. Apart from the Monpas and the Khamtis, whose creed is Buddhism, there are also many Nagas in the Tuensang Division who are Christian. Sri Shankardev preached his Vaishnavite cult in some lower regions of N.E.F.A. Almost all the other tribes have remained unbaptized and so, naturally, animist. They have not learnt to believe in God, but they are afraid of ghosts and spirits whom they periodically worship.

The Daflas, Apa Tanis, Khowas, Mijus, Khamtis and some Naga clans bury their dead bodies, while others follow the Hindu custom of burning them. The Sherdukpens burn the dead body of a well-to-do family, but bury that of a poor man. The tribes of the Mishmi Hills, as a rule, burn dead bodies. The Abors preserve the dead body for one night before its burial.

Matrimonial alliances are generally settled by the male parents, though a young boy and a girl are at liberty to select their own life companions. The bride has to be paid her price. inter-clan marriages are also prevalent in certain areas. The law of inheritance is in the case of most clans partriarchal.

ECONOMIC PURSUITS

Agriculture is the main occupation of the N. E. F. A. people. Other than the Apa Tanis, the Manpas and the Sherdukpens, the people in that region use 'jhum' cultivation. The Apa Tanis are adept in agriculture and practise only permanent cultivation, both dry and wet. The Monpas use both permanent and shifting cultivations, as due to the sloping condition of their land they cannot stick to the permanent cultivation in all cases. Some tribes of the Kameng Division also use bullocks and ploughs in their fields. Such ploughs are all made of wood and do not have any metal ploughshare.

The N. E. F. A. people have a special knack for cottage industries and are, in fact, very expert craftsmen. Many articles of their daily use are made of bamboo and cane. Except the

Mijus, Akas and Daflas, all other tribes know the art of spinning and weaving. The colourful dresses, which the Mishmis and the Abors make and use, are unique in their artistic designs.

The Khamti priests, at leisure hours, employ themselves in carving wood, bone or ivory. The tribal chiefs also work in gold, silver and iron. With these materials they make weapons for themselves and ornaments for their women.

The sports and dances of the N. E. F. A. tribals are reflective of their daily life. By their dresses they often look like birds and animals of the wood, perhaps a means of camouflage.

This would show, as Dr. B. S. Guha claims, that "by and large these people are of considerably higher (than the Central India and South-Western India and South-Western India aboriginals) stages of development and can by no means be called primitive, although their social organization is simple and they live in constant feuds". It is in these perspectives that we should view things about the tribal people and decide upon the line of our approach to them.

INTEGRATION OF NORTH-EAST FRONTIER REGION

As I have already stated, the British Government's policy of Inner Lines Regulation, etc. was prompted by their imperialistic designs. Against this background, it was therefore a logical conclusion after Independence that our Government's policy with regard to the hills people (I am discussing in this article about the N. E. F. region in particular) would be one of integration not by declaration alone, but also in practice. But unfortunately, that has not been so.

Though a separate administrative unit, the North East Frontier Agency-until 1950, the administrative head of this Agency was the same Adviser also for the hill areas, which now form part A of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. It was following the inauguration of the Constitution that the N. E. F. Agency became detached from the autonomous hills and comprised only the Part B regions, mentioned in the Sixth Schedule.

FRONTIER SERVICE

Yet, possibly, it was not before the time corresponding with liberation of Tibet that the N. E. F. region shot into singular

importance as a "strategic" frontier tract. The N. E. F. A. administration, like the N. E. F. region itself, is a well-guarded top-secret organization. More so is the External Affairs Ministry of the Government of India, which guides that administration. It is, therefore, not possible to correctly assess and, it is also not wise to hazard any guess as to what exactly have the Government of India in mind in keeping the N. E. F. A. under the External Affairs Ministry and in instituting recently an Indian Frontier Service exclusively for areas like Manipur, Tripura and N. E. F. A. Lately, again, it is in the news that the Government of India were contemplating to form a composite administrative unit with N.E.F.A., Naga Hills, Manipur and Tripura all situated on the outer contours of Assam. I do not know if the Press report in this behalf is altogether a myth, though apparently the proposition does not look at all to be without any meaning. Anyway, this is a difficult proposition, as such, an "anschluss" of mutually divergent races has to obtain prior consent of the people of the Naga Hills of Manipur and of Tripura, who are agitating in their respective ways for greater autonomy. On the other hand, such a proposition would throw in the air the Government of India's declared policy of eventually integrating the N. E. F. A. and also the Naga Hills with Assam.

N.E.F.A. POLICY

To understand the Government of India's current N. E. F. A. policy, it is necessary to understand the Nehru Plan which is supposed to guide that policy. I do not, however, know if the Prime Minister has framed any such solid document as we generally term a "Plan". Possibly, it is his speech delivered at the opening session of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas conference held in New Delhi in 1952 and possibly some other speeches here and there, that have come to be popularly known as the Nehru Plan. Dr. Elwin has summarized the main points of that Plan in the following words. "We do not want to preserve the tribesmen as museum specimens, but equally we do not want to turn them into clowns in a circus. We do not want to stop the clock of progress, but we do want to see that it keeps the right time. We may not believe in the myth of Noble Savage, but we do not want to create a class of Ignoble Serfs."

But, then, Dr. Elwin says: "The task set by Mr. Nehru is

no easy one, for it involves several ideals that have been found compatible. The first is to preserve, strengthen and develop all that is best in tribal society, culture, art and language. The second is to protect tribal economic rights. The third is to unite and integrate the tribes in a true heart-unity with India as a whole, so that they may play a full part in her life. And the last is to develop welfare and educational facilities, so that every tribesman may have an equal opportunity with his fellow-citizens of the open country and the plains”.

INTEGRATION IS NOT ISOLATION

I think nobody will find any fault with anything of the above plan, so nicely interpreted by Dr. Elwin. I have already said that it is not the plan itself but the policy, rather the “modus operandi.” That needs a change. If “integration” does not mean “assimilation,” it does not mean “isolation” either. Our contention is that the Government of India is pursuing a policy in N. E. F. A., which very much resembles a policy of isolation.

It is unfair to surmise that any conscientious plains people of Assam have any motive of exploitation, any ulterior design up their sleeves to grab the land and forests of the N. E. F. A. people, or “interfere with them in any way except with their consent and goodwill.” Nor is it true that they want to “impose” the culture of the plains people on the people of N. E. F. A. or of any tribal area, for the matter of that. Through centuries, Assam has sheltered different races with different cultures, and this State to-day is truly a replica of India. Indeed, there are instances of racial and cultural integrations, but I do not know if there was any case of forcible imposition in that process of integration. Different races of Assam have adopted different traits of other cultures of their neighbours as have attracted them, and have done so quite peacefully. There is no cause, therefore, of any anxiety in any quarter that “the natural good taste of the hill tribes” would be debased.

DYNAMIC HUMAN CULTURE

Yet, why so much talks about culture? I have already said that human culture is dynamic and that a change for social order does not bring a change only in economic and political set-ups, but a profound change also in culture. It is in isolation that

a particular culture remains a stagnant particular culture. If isolation is not the aim, you cannot aim at keeping the primitive culture intact. What is important is that "the tribes must have the freedom and time not only to adjust themselves to the inevitable cultural changes but also to direct them, as far as possible, along lines in harmony with their traditional cultures" to which we have already conceded.

So, if the purpose is that the N. E. F. A. people should retain all the good aspects of their culture and should also emulate the good things of the plains culture, while giving up their own customs and rejecting the evil traits of the plains culture well, then the means to achieve it is not "isolation", but "education."

PROPER DEVELOPMENT

We want the people of N.E.F.A. to develop to the level of other Indian people. Health, education and economic well being are the three fundamental requisites of an individual, while the question of social or political development comes later. I need not discuss here about the development of health among the N. E. F. A. people. The Government of India are surely giving proper attention to that development, because above everything else a frontier people, whom we want to be soldiers and sentinels of a vast country, must be made healthy, strong and stout.

EDUCATION

But about education? The earliest course of education should of course, centre round the activities familiar to the tribal folk. The first thing after that, which I think our frontier people should learn, is that they do not belong to Tibet or Burma but that they are Indians. This naturally calls for a knowledge about the geography and the history of the people of India, which series of course again has to start with a knowledge of Assam and her people who are not only their neighbours but also partners in the same house so to say. That alone can remove the haze of ignorance and mis-understanding that may exist in the minds of N. E. F. A. people about the people of the plains due

to isolation during the British regime. That will also pave the way for progressive integration.

About one thing there is however no conflict of opinions. It is that at the primary stage the people should learn things in their own dialects, and that "we must go out of our way" in the words of Sri Nehru to encourage the tribal languages. But, there is some controversy about the medium of instruction in higher education and about the script where there is none. The N. E. F. A. administration is reported to have introduced Hindi language and Hindi script in spite of objections raised by some people of the region itself. It is really very difficult for us to understand as to what considerations have guided the administration to take this alleged move.

FURER-HEIMENDORF

Sri Hem Barua, in a recent speech in Parliament about the language policy in N.E.F.A., quoted Furer-Heimendorf saying: "If the tribesmen of the Subansiri region are to adapt themselves to the style of living of and closer contacts with outside world, a measure of education is indispensable to make this process a success. Only literacy and a knowledge of Assamese can enable Daflas or Apatanis to deal in equal terms with the people of the plain". Prof. K. P. Chattopadhyay, Head of the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University, says that while the medium of instruction will naturally be the tribal language spoken at home, the regional language should have its place as a subject of study in the upper form." This I have quoted from an article of Prof. Chattopadhyay, published in a Government of India publication. In the same article, he says regarding the script to be adopted: "As it is, the tribal people should adopt the script of the regional language of the State if the State has a single script."

These two observations of two recognized anthropologists do not leave any doubt that education in the N. E. F. region has to be, in all fairness, carried on in Assamese. Prof. Chattopadhyay also points to the need of adding a few phonemes to the regional language concerned "to represent sounds peculiar to the tribal language". Nobody in Assam, I am sure, will object to the addition of some characters to the Assamese script to represent the peculiar sound of tribal affricatives.

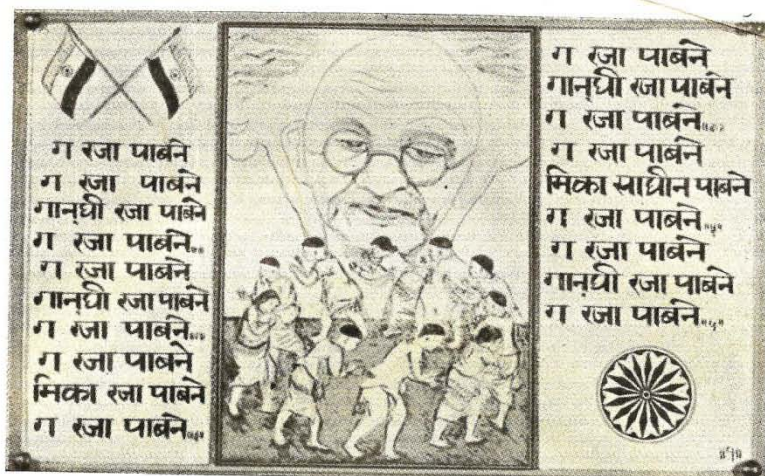
ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT

An improvement in health or in education will be immaterial for the N. E. F. A. people, if that does not associate with an improvement in their economic life as well.

The economic conditions of the people of that region are also linked up with those of the plains people. While promoting that relation, it may be necessary for sometime to safeguard those people against being converted into "helpless elements" as Dr. Nirmal Bose says in a larger economic organization which they cannot wholly comprehend. What Prof. Chattopadhyay says in this connection is also worth noting: "Just as it is possible to change archaic tools and replace them by those employed by our peasantry, it is possible to introduce modern technological advance among the tribal people". He points out that such a system has been carried out successfully among the tribal people of Russia and China and says that there are no grounds for thinking that such changes cannot be brought about by us among our tribal folk.

We have already experienced the result of an isolation approach and also of "most favoured treatment" in the tribal areas of the British brand. It pains us that the national Government pursues the same policy.

N. E. F. A., sooner or later, has to be integrated with Assam. But unfortunately the people of the region not only do not get sufficient knowledge about Assam to-day, but there is also not sufficient number of people of this State in the whole administration of N. E. F. A.



AN ADI (ABOR) SONG WRITTEN IN DEVNAGRI SCRIPT.



NAGA GROUP FROM TUENSANG.

By kind courtesy of the Publicity Department, N.E.F.A.



A MONPA LADY FROM KAMENG.

By kind courtesy of the Publicity Department, N.E.F.A.

THE LANGUAGE OF NEFA AND NATIONAL UNITY

Sri Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya

Late Banikanta Kakati once made a very thoughtful remark about the social history of Assam, and I for one, believe that it is necessary for every political and cultural worker to ponder over the same deeply. He said that after Sri Sankardev there had not yet appeared any second 'blending force' in the cultural firmament of Assam. At that time Sri Sankardev in order to unify the people of all classes into one integrated whole, set before them an ideal and an organisation as well.

Although the National Movement has given the plains-people an All Indian outlook, yet, as ill-luck would have it, it could not penetrate into the heart of the tribal people. This Socialist Movement has been trying to fill that desideratum of the National Movement, and if there appears a band of idealistic tribal workers, then it will not take long to forge unity among the people of Assam.

It is true that the Congress organisation and the Congress leaders are trying to create a band of leaders in the Hills, but the Congress would have been unable to create without the support of the Government. We must, of necessity, be able to find out a band of idealistic workers among every hill tribe in order to establish unity among the people, otherwise we shall fail to complete the work left to us by Sri Sankardev. The Congress rule both at the Centre and at the States has so far been disseminating the seeds of disunity on various occasions instead of forging the unity among the people.

CONGRESS SUCCEEDS THE BRITISH

Let us now start with the region known as the North-East Frontier Agency. This Agency, comprising, as it does an area

of 35,000 square miles and having six districts is the abode of ten lakhs of people.

This area is the habitat of such Nagas as the Manpa, the Daflas, the Sherduk Pens, the Apatanis, the Mizos, the Akas, the Singphows, the Abors, the Tagins, the Khamtis and the Tangas, the Sangtams, the Kanyaks, the Foams and the Saangs etc. Our relationship with the Nagas and other tribal peoples dates back to the days when Sukapha was yet to ascend the throne of the Ahom kingdom. Of course, this age-old relationship had to undergo a temporary snap as a result of the British rule in India. During their reign the Britishers had all along tried to impress upon the tribal people that the Assamese formed a distinct race by itself. Even now in the Congress regime efforts have been made to make them understand that they are the part and parcel of India and not of Assam only. By infusing such feelings into their minds the Nationalist leadership has put an obstacle on the path of the People's permanently unity. The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is rightly called the 'Magna Carta' of the tribal people. But this must be remembered that only beautiful words would lead us nowhere. Our constitutional reforms and developmental plans should be so made as to usher in a Socialistic Patern of Society where justice and equity are denied to none but granted to all. The first and foremost requirements towards that end are workers, organisation and creation of an ideal. When there is no unity of ideals, there is no unity of feelings and when that is so, no national unity can be achieved. That is why the greatest need of the country is to make the people conscious. It is for this reason again, that it has been demanded today that our constitutional and developmental programmes should be so made as to enable both the Hills and the Plains people to develop, each depending on the other. Charges that the people of this State are very narrow-minded have already contaminated the whole atmosphere of India. It is, for this reason, upto our youths and the socially conscious workers to prove that they are the defenders of the larger interest of the Indian people as a whole, that their aim is not to keep the tribal people as down-trodden masses, by their actions, their speeches and the last but not the least, by their thoughts. We must show them clearly in our words and deeds that in our country it is not a section of rulers belonging to a

special community who runs the Government, but the entire masses are the masters and they run the administration.

Unfortunately, the type of Government at present in India has brought disgrace on the fair name of democracy. The tribals specially are not satisfied with this type of Government. Now, keeping this in view we must build such a separate leadership in Assam as would be able to feel the pulse of both the plains and the hills people. Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting the Mizo M.P. Mr. Thanhkira who showed keen interest when I told him about it. It is not impossible to build such a strong leadership if at all we proceed on the path of action with the needed feeling and determination. Cowards have no place in politics, specially, so far as our problem state of Assam is concerned it is persistent and only bold work on our part can improve the situation. The unity of the Assamese people is the first step towards national unity. Will the Congress leadership understand this simple fact? Yes, this indeed is a question of paramount importance. Whether the Congress is able to understand this or not we must not bother about that, but we all ought however, to understand that we should from now onwards try to amalgamate the administration of NEFA with that of Assam in a determined fashion. In this context the language problem of NEFA is worth considering. The Nationalist rulers wrongly think that these under-developed hill tribes would turn Indians, the moment they are taught Hindi from the very beginning. But we hold just the opposite view, because instances of all kinds can be multiplied to show that the bulk of the population of NEFA use Assamese as their own language.

THE SUITABILITY OF ASSAMESE LANGUAGE

The celebrated anthropologist, Mr. Heiman Dorfe while speaking about the medium of instruction of the Daflas and the Apatanis of the Subansiri Area said with absolute certitude that the very basis of all kinds of knowledge must be a knowledge of colloquial Assamese. Also he aptly remarked—"Assamese is adaptable for them, because when these tribes talk with outsiders they generally do so in Assamese," (From a note given in the year 1947). It will not be out of place if I refer in this connection to a remark made by a British Military Officer in 1873. He said "In every tribe near the plains there are people

who speak Assamese and they are themselves the spokesmen of the whole tribals."

It hardly needs any emphasis that Assamese is the special language for the Nagas. That the Abors, the Mishmis, the Khamtis, the Singhphows and the Akas—these hill tribes know Assamese can very well be understood if we are once allowed to enter NEFA. In the circumstances if Assamese is not taught in the schools of NEFA, then it will appear to us as nothing short of a piece of chauvinism on the part of those who are at the helm of affairs of the administration concerned. We are prepared to leave this matter in the hands of an impartial Inquiry Committee. It is our firm belief that the impartial judgment of the Committee on various counts will naturally be in favour of Assam.

NOT AT THE COST OF ASSAMESE

To make Hindi the Common Language of NEFA is wholly a question of Rastrabhasa. We favour the learning of Hindi but not at the cost of our own language—Assamese. It is indeed a matter of great regret in the contemporary history that a section of officers have indulged in creating a firment in the minds of the India Government by a mere show of chauvinism in as much as it holds that the cultural homogeneity of Assam will not necessarily influence the cultural homogeneity of India as a whole. In doing so, the India Government has cut at the root of the good things both of the past and of the present. The sooner it changes its policy the better is the chance for ensuring education and national feelings among the inhabitants of NEFA. The moment we lay blames at the door of the Government we must also be prepared to shoulder that onerous responsibility that avails us.

Due to the failures of the present leadership of Assam the ignominious charge that the people of this State are very narrow-minded has already contaminated the whole atmosphere of India. It is for this reason, upto our youth and the socially conscious workers to prove that they are the defenders of the larger interest of the India people, as a whole their aim is not to keep the tribal people as down-trodden masses by their actions, their speeches and the last but not the least by their thoughts. We must show them clearly in our words and deeds that in our country it is not

a section of rulers belonging to a special community who runs the Government but the entire masses are masters and they run the administration.

Unfortunately, the type of Government at present in India has brought disgrace to the fair name of democracy. The tribals specially are not satisfied with this type of Government. Now, keeping this in view we must build such a separate leadership in Assam as would be able to feel the pulse of both the plains and the hills people. Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting the Mizo M.P. Mr. Thanhkira who showed keen interest when I told him about it. It is not impossible to build such a strong leadership if at all we proceed on the path of our action with the needed feeling and determination. Cowards have no place in politics. Specially, so far as our problem state Assam is concerned it is persistent bold work on our part that would lead us to our cherished ideal.

RE-INTRODUCTION OF ASSAMESE IN N.E.F.A.

PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS ARE TO BE NOTED

Sri Hem Barua, M.P.

Sri Hem Barua, M.P., in a speech delivered recently in the Lok Sabha, urged upon the Union Government to re-introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in the N.E.F.A., in order to satisfy the desires and aspirations of the people living in the region.

The following is the text of Sri Barua's speech :

I would not be discussing the general policies of education pursued by the Government of India, but I would concentrate my discussion on a particular aspect of the policy that is pursued by the Government of India. It is, so far as the North-East Frontier Agency is concerned.

There has been trouble in the tribal areas of the North-East Frontier, and this trouble is not only political and economic but cultural and social as well. We know, these tribal people were isolated from the people of the plains by British rule. The British Raj for obvious reasons instituted iron curtains between the people of the plains and the people of the hills. They had two nefarious regulations. One is the Inner Line Regulations passed in 1873, and the other is the Frontier Tracts Regulations passed in 1880. These have created a sort of separatist psychology amongst these people.

PSYCHOLOGY OF COMPREHENSIVE INDIAN MIND

On the other hand, as soon as we became free it was the business or it should have been the objective of the Government of India to create a new psychology amongst those people, and that psychology would be the psychology of a comprehensive

Indian mind. To-day what do we find amongst these people? We find that comprehensive Indian mind is lacking among the tribal population inhabiting the North-East Frontier Agency, because of the fact that we have pursued the same bygone policy adopted by the British rulers—the policy of isolation. And that was given a fillip to, when Professor Coupland, the British Constitutional Expert came to this country prior to independence. He made a very sordid suggestion, a suggestion that the hills of Assam and the hills of Upper Burma must be bound together and a new colony instituted under the auspices of the British rule.

That psychology is still there, and that is why we feel that the linguistic aspirations of the people inhabiting the N.E.F.A. area are to be met. But, somehow or other we are pursuing a most emasculated policy, and that is because of our bureaucrats, the administrators who have gone there all these years, who know nothing about the colourful life of the population there, the veins of the people there, the cultural standards of the people there and the aspirations of the people there. At the same time, they have there own steel-framed mind, and they suggest and commend certain things which go counter to the desires and aspirations of the people. That is the crux of the problem.

I know, on the floor of this House I was just discussing the other day during question hour about certain memoranda submitted by the tribal people inhabiting this area. These people have been demanding that Assamese should be the medium of instruction in the schools but, somehow or other, Assamese is not the medium of instruction there, Hindi is being super-imposed. I want Hindi to develop, because Hindi is our national language, but not at the risk of super-imposing it on a people who want a separate language, who have different aspirations and who, at the same time, say that Hindi is to be introduced as a compulsory subject in the later stages of educational life and not as a medium of education or instruction at the initial levels.

GANDHIJÍ'S VIEW

This is what Gandhiji has also said in his famous book called, 'Our Language Problem.' He has said that the medium of instruction must be in the mother tongue of the child. And, the medium of instruction should be in the mother tongue of the

elementary stage, we want this language to develop so as to be able to be, the medium of instruction in the higher and secondary language and not only as the medium of instruction at the tribal population. We want the tribal dialects to develop into a stage as well.

At the same time, these people have submitted more than one memorandum asking the Government of India to see that Assamese is used as the medium of instruction in the higher stages i.e. post-elementary stages, because Assamese is the natural *lingua franca* of the people. There are different tribal groups. There are as many as fifty tribal groups living in the N.E.F.A. area. For some reasons these people have their own dialects, but in their inter-tribal communications, in the inter-tribal exchange of ideas, they use only one language, and that is Assamese.

When these people inhabiting the tribal areas established contacts with the people of the plains, which they had been establishing since time immemorial before the British came and isolated them from the people of the plains, they used the Assamese language. Now there is a provision in our Constitution which provides for the ultimate integration of the N.E.F.A. region with the State of Assam. If that provision is given effect to, in that case they must be taught in a language which they can understand. And there is no question of this provision of the constitution not being given effect to.

ASSAMESE SCRIPT

Naturally enough, Assamese script must be used for the Assamese language. Hindi would be introduced at the higher stages, just as Hindi is introduced in the non-Hindi speaking areas in the plains. Hindi should enjoy that position. That is what I say. At the same time, we should remember that Assamese is their natural language for inter-tribal communication. I would quote from what Dr. Hutton has said in his book, 'The Sema Nagas.'

"Indeed the Assamese language as used in the Naga Hills is peculiarly well adapted for the reproduction of Nagas idioms and as a vehicle of interpretation, it makes a far better *lingua franca* for the hills than Hindusthani or English would, the

substitution of which for Assamese has been occasionally suggested."

I want Hindi to occupy the same place as English is occupying to-day as far as we are concerned in these areas. May I quote another authority, W. C. Smith. In his book 'The Ao Nagas.' He says :

"In the neighbouring tribe, the Lohta Nagas, the Assamese language is used freely and this no doubt is largely due to the fact that they raised cotton which is sold to the traders in the Assam Valley. In this way, their contacts have been more numerous. As a result of these contacts, the Assamese language is coming to be used by an increasing number of Nagas and the Assamese terms are creeping into their language."

J. P. MILLS

I will quote another authority, J. P. Mills. He says :

"The Aos have probably received more admixture of actual Assamese blood than most Naga tribes, and during the Burmese invasions, many Assamese took refuge in the 'Ao country. The Lohta Nagas have long been in contact with the Assamese. Many villages even possess grants of land in the plains given by the Ahoms Rajas."

HAIMENDORF

Then I quote another great authority on the tribal population of the North-East, Furer Von-Haimendorf. He says :

"If the tribes-men of the Subansiri region are to adapt themselves to their style of living and closer contacts with outside world, a measure of education is indispensable to make this process a success. Only literacy and a knowledge of Assamese can enable Daflas or Apatanis to deal in equal terms with the people of the plains. There can be no doubt that acquisition of a working knowledge of colloquial Assamese must be the first choice among the Daflas and South Kamal Miris."

STRONG DEMAND

My argument is this. The demand of this tribal population inhabiting the N.E.F.A. area—they live in 50 different groups—is for the Assamese language because of its historical association and because of the fact that Assamese is the natural *lingua franca* of the different tribal groups inhabiting the North-East

Frontier Agency and also because that it is the natural language of the tribal population inhabiting the hills used in their contacts and communication with the people of the plains. That is why these tribal people have submitted that memorandum. As a matter of fact, I know that the memorandum, to which I made a reference on the floor of this House, was submitted to the Governor of Assam, who is in charge of the administration of the N.E.F.A. area, on the 22nd May last by the tribal population of Margherita, demanding that Assamese should be the medium of instruction in the schools.

MEMORANDA FROM THE TRIBAL LEADERS

Another memorandum was submitted by the tribal people of the Lohit Frontier Division to the State Government. Recently on the 9th June there was a Language Day of the N.E.F.A. people organized by the *Asam Sahitya Sabha* and meetings were held demanding the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction. There were two speeches by two great tribal leaders, besides these, by tribal students reading in the basic training school at Margherita. The name of one is Abang and the name of the other is Khongpai. These tribal leaders made speeches on the 9th June demanding Assamese to be the medium of instruction there in the N.E.F.A. regions.

HINDI MUST GROW, BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF ASSAMESE

Under these circumstances I do not say that Hindi must not grow. Hindi is our national language and it must grow. As a matter of fact, since I came to New Delhi, the aspiration that is uppermost in my mind is that I should learn Hindi; but at the same time, they must learn it not at the expense of their own desire and aspirations.

That is why I want this House to see that proper justice is done to the people inhabiting the N.E.F.A. region. India is a land of Einsteins and Adams and the Adams of India live in the North-East regions. So, we should see to it that the smouldering fire which was injected into them by the British and by Prof. Coupland, the British Constitutional Expert, does not burst into a consuming flame and for that we should be able to satisfy the desires and aspirations of our people living in the tribal areas.

THE POSITION OF THE ASSAMESE LANGUAGE IN THE NORTH EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

The State of Assam is the homeland of different tribal groups both in the hills and plains, who differ from one another in point of ethnology, dialects, cultural and social set-up. Because of the isolation of the hills and the plains mainly under British rule the tribal people of the hills have been maintaining their separate identities from those of the plains as well as among themselves. In the case of the plains tribal population it is different due mainly to easy social mobility and means of communication. It is because of such facilities that the tribal population of the plains has been able to contribute largely to the synthetic growth of a culture, known as Assamese culture. History establishes the fact of such synthesis and social and cultural assimilation as may be pointed out in relation to the Ahoms, a race of Mongoloid people, who migrated into Assam in the 13th century A.D. from across the Patkais and ruled Assam for nearly six hundred years as also other Mongoloid and Tibeto-Burman peoples, viz., Bodos, Chutiyas, etc. In this connection, we quote Dr. S. K. Chatterji, the great linguist and oriental scholar, who observes in his authoritative work *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India*.

"Assam with Nepal helped very largely in the absorption of this Kirata element in the formation of the North Indian (Hindu) people. This can be looked upon as Assam's great contribution to the synthesis of cultures and fusion of races that took place in India—a synthesis which had started in pre-historic times when two distinct races found that they were to reside together in the same country—the Austric and the Mongoloid, the Dravidian and the Austric, and the Dravidian and the Mongoloid."

The Ahoms abandoned their own language and culture to

a great extent and assimilated the language of the people they ruled, as pointed out by Dr. Chatterji, due to the fact that they were "more receptive to new ideas and were in temperament more adaptive." Again, Dr. Chatterji observes:

The late medieval period in the history of Assam under the Ahom kings was, as we have seen, a period partly of travail for Assam, when her various tribal peoples of Mongoloid origin—the original Bodos and others and the Austric peoples allied to the Khasis, together with that strong group of Shan new comers, the Ahoms—were finally welded together as a single Assamese speaking nation.

This process of happy synthesis among the Hills and the plains people grew and developed to a great extent during the Ahom rule on the cultural and political aspects of it, which however, unfortunately enough, received a total set back under British power, who for obvious reasons instituted an iron curtain by introducing the Inner Line Regulation (1873) and the Frontier Tracts Regulations (1880), and also created a psychology of isolationism amongst different peoples. This, we are afraid would ultimately stand in the way of a healthy growth of nationalism unless the danger is nipped in the bud by careful planning of relations between the Hills and the Plains so that it might result in a happy rehabilitation of the mind.

It may be noted that there are over fifty different principal tribes in the N. E. F. A., each having its own dialect, and there are groups among them with a population of less than ten thousand. These different tribal groups, in matters of inter-tribal contacts, used and have been using the Assamese language as their *lingua franca* a since time immemorial, as because the different tribal dialects are a closed book to each other. In this connection we may point out as an instance the fact of a single ethnic group known as Nagas and in support of our thesis we quote the following eminent authorities.

"Indeed the Assamese language as used in the Naga Hills is peculiarly well adopted for the reproduction of Naga idioms and as a vehicle of interpretation, it makes a far better *lingua franca* for the hills than Hindusthani or English would, the substitution of which for Assamese has been occasionally suggested."

—Dr. J. H. Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, p. 266.

"In the neighbouring tribe, the Lohta Nagas, the Assamese language is used freely and this no doubt is largely due to the fact that they raised cotton which is sold to the traders in the Assam Valley. In this way, their contacts have been more numerous.....As a result of these contacts, the Assamese language is coming to be used by an increasing number of Nagas and the Assamese terms are creeping into their language."

—W. C. Smith, *The Ao Nagas*, p. 177-c.
Dr. Hutton, again writes:

"The Aos have probably received more admixture of actual Assamese blood than most Naga tribes, and during the Burmese invasions many Assamese took refuge in the Ao country.

They (the Lohta Nagas) have long been in contact with the Assamese. Many villages even possess grants of land in the plains given by the Ahom Rajas."

—J. P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, p. 4-n.

Further, we give below the following quotations from authorities with regard to other hill tribes the N. E. F. A. area in support of our contention above. Von furer-Haimendorf in his Report on the Educational Policy in the Subansiri Areas observes:

"If the tribesmen of the Subansiri region are to adopt themselves to their style of living and closer contacts with outside world, a measure of education is indispensable to make this process a success. Only literacy and a knowledge of Assamese can enable Dafflas or Apatanis to deal in equal terms with the people of the plains.

There can be no doubt that acquisition of a working knowledge of colloquial Assamese must be the first choice among the Dafalas and South Kamal Miris."

In 1873 a British officer wrote, "Assamese-knowing men are very helpful."

We are of the emphatic opinion that Assamese has the age-old tradition as being the lingua franca among the different tribes in their commercial and other contracts. Further, Assamese has been the lingua franca among the different tribes and has been used in their contacts (commercial, social and otherwise) with the plains people from ages past.

Here we want to point out that Assamese is a composite language, the texture of which is made up of both Indo-Aryan

and Indo-Chinese elements. Assamese has not only assimilated words from such sources as the Khasi, Naga, Bodo, Mikir, Hill Miri, etc., but is also influenced likewise in point of grammar, syntax and pronunciation. In support of this, we may draw your attention to the observations made by Dr. B. Kakati in his authoritative work, *'Assamese: Its Formation and Development.'*

Ancient Assam history establishes the fact of a close political relationship between the hill tribes and the Ahom rulers of the plains. It is not only that the friendly neighbouring tribal chiefs paid friendly visits to the Ahom court, but also that there were treaties of amity and friendship between the rulers of the plains and those of the hills. Besides there are historical evidences of how the tribal chiefs helped the Ahom rulers with men and materials, specially with soldiers for the Ahom army in their frequent encounters with outside invaders. Lachit Bar Phukan, a national hero of Assam, had his army consisting of tribal people like the Nagas and the Miris, some of whom even held military ranks as Captains and Generals. This shows that ancient Assam, composed, as it is, with the plains and the hills that dot and surround it, was considered as a separate and single consolidated identity to be jointly defended and protected from outside onslaughts.

It may further be mentioned here that Sankardeva, the foremost Assamese religious preacher and social reformer, dreamt and worked for a homogenous map of Assam embracing the different tribal races and peoples. He had disciples among the Nagas, the Garos, the Mikirs, etc., some of whom held distinguished positions of *Atas*, i.e., venerable preachers, like Narottam of the Nagas, Govinda of the Garos, Balai of the Mikirs.

The Constitution of India provides for the ultimate integration of the N.E.F.A. with Assam and the present Administration is only an interim arrangement. It is with a sense of deep regret that we note that in the face of all these natural processes of synthesis and harmony, instead of preparing the ground for ultimate integration the present Administration is following a policy of disintegration and isolation—

(i) by gradually seeking to eliminate, by direct or indirect processes, the Assamese language, which has been the medium of instruction since Independence ;

(ii) by gradually seeking to frustrate the desire of the tribal people for adoption of the Assamese language, which has already been a basis, as pointed out above, as also the manners, customs and cultural traditions that might invariably lead to a synthesis and harmonious relation between the Hills and Plains in this defence frontier of India ;

(iii) by deliberate and systematic attempt on the part of the Administration to suppress and discourage, at places, the desire of the tribal people for cultural and social contact with the Assamese people of the plains ;

and (iv) by debarring the local journalists connected with Assam papers from visiting the N.E.F.A. areas.

Here we painfully record our objection to the fact that the Commission appointed by the Union Education Ministry to go into the question of script and language of the N.E.F.A. areas did not care to consult (i) expert opinion in Assam, with which the Agency is going to be integrated as a single administrative unit, and (ii) did not, we are afraid, consult the N.E.F.A. people themselves and instead, came to conclusions on the basis of evidences recorded from officers and their subordinates and so-called leaders of the tribal people, dressed up by the Administration. We fail to understand the reasons which prompted the Authorities to cover up the composition and conclusions of the Commission with secrecy.

We request the Government, to see that the public of Assam is taken into confidence by publishing the report of the above Commission, including notes of dissent, if any, by any of its members.

Further, it may be pointed out—

(a) that the desire of the tribal people, at places, to maintain Assamese costumes and dresses, to which they have been habituated since time immemorial, has been sternly discouraged ;

(b) that the tribal population are discouraged from associating themselves, when they so desire, with Assamese festivals and ceremonies ;

and (c) that it is deplorable to note that even Assamese officers and other employees of the Agency are discouraged and debarred from instituting their own indigenous festivals and ceremonies like Nam-kirtan, Bihu and Huchari ;

and (d) that even our religious preachers who have a number

of disciples, in the hill areas are debarred from visiting their disciples, even when the tribal people so desire and extend invitation to their spiritual heads. This can be substantiated by a concrete instance of how the Chaliha Bareghar Sattradhikar was arrested and fined when he undertook a visit to his tribal disciples in the N.E.F.A. areas.

In view of the consideration stated above, we submit

(i) that Assamese be retained as the medium of instruction in schools, where it already exists ;

(ii) that in areas where the language does not exist as the medium of instruction, the tribal tongue, if possible, be introduced as the medium ;

[In case the tribal people so desire, Assamese may be adopted as the medium of instruction in these areas.]

(iii) that the Assamese language should be retained and encouraged as the lingua franca, which position it has been naturally enjoying since time immemorial ;

and (iv) that in areas where the tribal tongue is adopted as the medium of instruction, the Assamese language should be taught as a compulsory second language.

In view of the above considerations, we also vehemently oppose the Government proposal, as held out in a recent statement, to adopt Assamese only as optional language in the Agency and propose that in the interest of the tribal people themselves, due and ultimate rights of the Assamese be given and guaranteed in the N. E. F. A. in the light of the facts and suggestions made above.*

Nalinibala Debi

Hem Barua

Satyendranath Sarma

Harendranath Barua

Atulchandra Hazarika

Maheswar Neog

Benudhar Sharma

Parag Chaliha

Jatindranath Goswami

on behalf of the Asam Sahitya Sabha.

* Adapted from the memoranda submitted to Syed Fazl Ali, Governor of Assam, and Pandit G. B. Pant, Home Minister, Government of India.

RE-INTRODUCTION OF ASSAMESE LANGUAGE IN N.E.F.A. DEMANDED

Tribal Leaders' Memorandum to Governor of Assam

The inhabitants of the Lohit Frontier Division of N.E.F.A. in a Memorandum submitted to Syed Fazl Ali, Governor of Assam, demanded that the Government should provide such authority in the region capable of understanding the people through the medium of Assamese, their *lingua-franca*.

The memorandum was submitted to the Governor on February 10 at his camp at Tezpur, on behalf of the people belonging to the Abor, Mishmi and Khamti races.

The tribal people have complained that they could not approach their proper authority as the latter did not know the local dialect. They, therefore, always required some agency to convey their grievances. In their opinion, it was an unnecessary harassment to them because they could not be sure whether their grievances were exactly conveyed to the authority.

The Memorandum submitted that the Assamese language was taken formerly as the medium of education, which was the *lingua-franca* of the Division and where this particular language was popular.

Following is the full text of the Memorandum :—

We the inhabitants of the Lohit Frontier Division beg to submit before you the following subjects for favour of your immediate action and early redress.

Education (general): After Independence, the benign Government of India has taken up the plan to uplift and educate the tribal people and opened some schools in the interior part of the Division. At the first stage tribals were assured that free rations and clothing will be given to the students and accordingly these have been supplied to these schools to some extent.

The Assamese language was taken as the medium of education which is the *lingua-franca* of the Division where this particular language is popular. It is a very pathetic matter that many of the students have been sent out depriving of the general education to other training such as Technical, Agricultural and Hindi etc. It is desired that those students, who are already continuing general studies in schools may not be sent out for such training before acquiring sufficient knowledge of their academical qualification through Matriculation.

Hindi may be taught to the students in the same school taking it as a compulsory subject through the medium of Assamese language. It is known to your honour that in this Division seven classes of tribals are living such as Abor, Khamti, Edu, Miju, Digaru, Miri, Singpho and Tibetans. Assamese is the main language to exchange thoughts amongst ourselves. Now the supply of free ration and free studentship of the interior school have been suddenly stopped and in consequence, students of these schools are compelled to leave the school as tribal people are still not self-sufficient to bear the expenses of their children for education.

Cottage Industries : The Government of India opened some C.I.T.P.C. Centres in this Division to train up the tribal people in various crafts such as Carpentry, Sewing, Blacksmithy, Weaving, Pottery, Soap-making and Bamboo and Cane Sections. Out of the above crafts, specially in the weaving section, tribal trainees are taught to learn their indigenous loom which they already know. As such, it is desired that there is no possibility of improvement in weaving unless tribal trainees are taught through improved looms and other than to operate sewing machines, embroideries, etc. as the plains people do. During the past few years many such trainees were provided with certificates as passed trainees and were removed from the training centre, without any future provision. And it may be pointed out that these trainees cannot run independent profession as they are not in a position to purchase materials and implements etc. required for them after completion of training and now they have to earn their bread by carrying loads like other people of the Division. Specially the fate of some girl trainees are very pitiable now. It is desired that instead of incurring such expenditure in such institutions these amount may

be diverted for betterment of other useful public institutions such as Agriculture, Educational, Medical etc.

Agriculture : It is quite a known fact that Agriculture is the backbone of the tribal people of the Division but people cannot devote their energy on cultivation due to heavy load carrying operations from Government side very frequently. On the other hand seeds and implements are also distributed to the people for improvement of their agriculture. As such it is desired that tribals should be relieved from the load carrying torture and given the chance to put their energy in their fields for their around progress.

Medical : The Government is kind enough to open many hospitals and dispensaries in the remote localities for the treatment of the Tribals. Stock of medicine for those dispensaries may be stocked in advance, as in summer some dispensaries become inaccessible and at the same time stock of medicine runs short. The people also cannot come down for treatment to the better hospitals due to disruption of communications. It is natural that the tribal people in the interior suffer from many diseases in the summer and for want of treatment many people die every year. Provision also may be made for better treatment of tribal patients outside N.E.F.A. as the officers and Government employees are getting.

Engineering : Although it is the policy of the Government that the tribal contractors should be given preference to construct buildings, roads etc. and engage the tribals to execute all such works ; but now it is seen that contractors from the plains are given preference instead of the tribals for such works and outside labourers are also engaged instead of the tribals. Even petty contracts are also given to the outsiders. Tribal tenderers for such contracts are also asked to deposit security money etc. to execute such works when they get. It is desired that Tribals may be excused for such securities in advance as they are poor and let them the chance to get more contracts for the betterment of their own place and people.

Trade : Even Trading and Hawkers' licenses are also given to the aboriginal outsiders and fate of tribals are not considered properly. Some time outside traders are selling essential goods at high rates ignoring the rates fixed by the Government. It is suggested that these traders should be asked to stock all

essential goods during winter season for sale in summer and relieve the tribals as well as others from paying exorbitant rates. It should be mentioned that when a Trading license is given to anyone it may be remarked on the license that they will have to stock atleast four months rations during winter for sale in summer when communication is disrupted. It is also observed that some time the Government employees were supplied ration etc. at low rates and tribals had to purchase goods from local bazaar at high rates. This sort of things should be discouraged to avoid discontentment of the local tribals.

General : It is bitterly experienced that the tribal authority does not know the local dialect, hence they always require some agency to convey their grievances. From our opinion, it is an unnecessary harrasment to us, because we cannot be sure whether our grievances are exactly conveyed to the authority. As such, it is prayed that the Government should provide such authority who will be able to understand the people through their *lingua-franca* directly.

In conclusion, we pray to your honour to pay kind attention to redress our grievances mentioned above and for this act of kindness we shall ever pray.

* By kind courtesy of the *Assam Tribune*, March 29, 1957.

THE NEBULA OF THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER

Sri Kirtinath Hazarika

"David Scott and his renown would ever remain green in the minds of the people of North-East Frontier... If his field of activities had been North-West India or Central India he would have had equal rank with Malcolm, Elphinstone and Metcuff in history." These words of Alexandar Meckenzie may not be historically important to us. But the British historians would feel proud of him, and of course, the Indian writers of history must admit it in determining the events of the time though they are not prone to feel proud of him. The British Empire no doubt owes a great deal to David Scott.

In a critical period of history David Scott came to this part of our country. But he did not come here with the mental outlook of a high official. Though he had to work here under the strict orders of the authority he could make the authority convinced to bring about a change of the administrative policy in this part of our country by virtue of his unrefutable arguments; for he was shrewd and sagacious. He had made the foundation of the British administration firm in Assam and had sown the seed of the North-East Frontier policy. In course of time the seed had shot up and grown into a large plant. The different British officers who came here had made their different contributions to make this N.E.F.A. policy firm and strong so as to suit the British interest.

To-day neither David Scott nor his disciples can guide us in formulating the administrative policy of the N.E.F.A. Now if we formulate the frontier policy in tune with that of the British then we would be committing a Himalayan plunder. But still we are harping on the old tune, for the simple reason that events there are being looked upon with an old eye. Even to-day as regards N.E.F.A. we have to fall back upon the news and

the facts that were gleaned by the British so as to suit their interest. It is a matter of regret that we have not undertaken the task yet, of gathering critically more knowledge and truth in the frontier for ourselves. We are doing many things, though not consciously, to the detriment of the interest of the people of the frontier. But the main object of the British frontier policy was to secure the British empire here by its common policy of *divide et-empera*. But our object must be different. We must see that we can keep the political integrity intact and thus allowing all people to prosper in their own way. We can be able to stand united against any danger, external or internal. So we must make it a point to look upon the people of the frontier in a way quite different from that of the British.

The British Government wanted to establish a dividing line between the frontier and the plains people. They could serve their interest by keeping the frontier people in the dark and the frontier people were not allowed to prosper at all. They wanted to shatter the unity between the hills and the plains by instilling fissiparous tendencies into their mind.

SEPARATION BEGINS

The British began to work very secretly with a view to carrying out the separatist policy. A British historian writes—"Constant quarrels took place between the British subjects of Assam and the frontier tribal people on account of the free communication between them." Further, he adds that the Government had to manipulate some tangled threads of affairs with the hill people near the plains when tea gardens were opened nearabout. In 1873 the Inner Line Regulation was passed under the plea of the quarrel between the plains and the hills. In accordance with the regulation no British subject of the plains was allowed to cross the fixed line without a pass or a license. But this fixed line was not the boundary line of the country—this line served as a boundary line of the administered area. Was not the past relation between these two areas cordial and friendly? Certainly it was.

Let us then, recall the Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880. Even then the British historian did not cease to advocate, "The inhabitants of the hill areas have not yet been fit to be governed under the laws of administration.So they have to be ruled

by the discretionary power of the administrator. This regulation has provided such measures."

It was 1911. Again the British historian said, "The frontier policy has been changed on account of the murder of Williamson and his party by the Abors living beyond the Inner Line and among tribes themselves there exists a long-drawn struggle." As a result a separate unit of administration named the Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tract under one political officer came into being. Then the British historian remarked, "This measure has done a great deal towards easing the tension between the hills and the plains."

AS IF THE TWO WERE STRANGERS TO EACH OTHER

Thus the separation between the plains and the hills was complete. The plains people became strangers to the hills people. The British Government blew their trumpet and British writers too wrote in tune with their trumpet that this administrative change had done good to the people of the hills and saved them from the influence of the plains. But did anybody try to know whether their deplorable condition was improved or made worse by this change? Did anybody know that their development got a severe set-back?

The British historians, then, found themselves well prepared to write the history of the hills anew. Their object was to wipe out the relation between the plains and the hills entirely from the minds of both the people. The relation between the hills and the plains has been dealt with in all the histories of Assam. Such relations were inevitable, for the hills people carried on their business of trade with the Assamese people and thus came in constant contact with them. Moreover, there was mutual help at the time of dangers and difficulties. Their contact with the Assamese people made Assamese the *lingua franca* even among themselves. Even to-day Assamese is spoken by the hills people of a certain area to convey their thoughts to the hills people of their neighbouring area; because in the hills there are various languages which do not have affinity with each other at all.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

Of course it must be frankly admitted that in early days quarrels took place between the hills and the plains. The hill's

people came down to the plains and caused many depredations. Why did such quarrels have to take place? Dr. S. K. Bhuyan explains the causes of these quarrels in his book *Anglo Asam:se Relations*—"The Ahom kings never desired to occupy the hill territories and bring the people under their full control; for they knew it perfectly well that if they would do that, then the hills people would recede to the more interior areas of the hills and in that case they would derive no other material gains except the abandoned hills that were too disadvantages for the plains people to inhabit. That was why the Ahom kings adopted strict and stern measures against their attack and plunder, but at the same time they did not fail to supply the hills people with their daily necessary articles."

It is very easy to hold the hills people responsible for the frontier disturbance and term them as 'barbarians.' But what is happening in the frontiers of those countries that claim themselves to be civilised and cultured? It is a matter of extreme regret that atrocities are committed on their borders in the name of security. Then does it behove on their part to call themselves civilised and cultured? Now then it is futile to attribute the cause of the frontier disturbances to the so-called 'barbarism' of the frontier hills people. We must try in right earnest to understand the conditions under which the hills people had to attack the people of the plains and take away many of them as captives.

The hill-regions were perilously difficult for cultivation. Besides, the strength of the population was not enough to cope with the tremendously difficult situation of labour in the field of cultivation. Consequently they suffered from want of food and this compelled them to come down to the plains and plunder the plains people.

FEAR OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The British did not try at all to do anything for the upliftment of their condition. The reason of this is not far to seek, for the British knew it well that their upliftment would make them politically conscious and their political consciousness would undoubtedly create political problems on the border. The British did never rely upon the Indian people. So being very much afraid of their political consciousness, the British

did not allow this to grow; rather, they tried their level best to instil a psychology of isolationism into their mind. This tendency was made more firm with the help of some educated tribal persons who were given privileges individually to establish themselves well in their life. The seeds of this separatist tendency were first sown there by the Christian missionaries. It is interesting to note that the British were always found to embark upon any adventure with their commercial transactions or missionaries or arms. Through the favour of the British Government and in the name of the service of humanity the Christian missionaries went there and began to work in different places of the hills. They found the people of the wide hilly regions steeped in the dark—there were no rivals to them nor was there any effort to make them enlightened. Therefore the missionaries did never do anything tangible towards getting rid of the separatist tendency—rather they also advocated for their separation. They also declared to the hills people that they would be converted to the same religion as that of their administrators. Then they gladly accepted christianity which made them completely biased to the British rulers.

PROCESS OF SEPARATION GEARED UP

After our independence the separatist tendency became more deep-rooted. The British diplomacy did not fail; for the Nagas demanded independence of their land instead of the political integrity of India. It is not difficult to understand who were those, that played their part in the back-ground of the Naga independence movement. Now the British administrators and the foreign missionaries are being openly accused for this. The recent Apatani revolt has thrown much light on this. Even after independence of India the British dreamt of a separate hill territory on the Indian border. Prof. Coopland also suggested this plan to the British Government.

WHAT SHRI BORDOLOI SAID

In 1950 Late Gopinath Bordoloi, on the occasion of inaugurating the Advisory Committee of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council remarked this with regret :—"We are really pained to learn that the former Governors of Assam and their supporters are advocating in England and in other places

for a 'Crown Colony' to be formed with the entire hill regions of Assam and the western hill regions of Burma. They tried to retain administrative hold in this part of our country even after we had thrown off the yoke of foreign domination. After going through the administrative files I have fully come to understand that the then rulers in Delhi made a plan to form such a 'Crown Colony', because they foresaw the possibility of such a colony. This separatist tendency was firmly rooted in the minds of the hills people. Besides, the intelligent section among them made them adequately conscious of this separation under the influence of their foreign masters. It is a matter of great regret that even now a certain section of people does not like to give up their demand of independence even when the new constitution has given them greater autonomy in local administration and ensured them the opportunity to raise the standard of their life and develop their land. Having gathered some experiences by touring the hills as Chairman of the Advisory Sub-Committee Bordoloi also opined in the same line.

THOU TOO, BRUTUS!

It would take time to dispel the strong fissiparous tendency that has been firmly rooted by the British on the mind of the hills people and it is no use of repenting for that, nor does it behave on our part to use force upon or be angry with the unsophisticated folks of the hills. It is quite natural that such a tendency might get into the minds of the hills people who have been made to feel themselves different from us for quite a long time. What to speak of them, even Rev. J. J. M. Nichols Roy, a former Congress Leader and Minister of Assam who was more or less connected with the making of the Indian Constitution is still doubtful to put faith on the people of the plains. On the occasion of the inauguration of the District Council of the Khasi-Jayantia Hills, in his address as the Chairman of the Reception Committee, he said "The hills people are eagerly looking forward to that day on which the people of the plains of India would change their narrow mental outlook for a larger interest of the whole of India."

It is no use making any comment on the speech of Mr. Nichols Roy. However, for it we cannot but say to him in terms of Cæsar—'*Et-tu-Brute.*' Now if we have any biased

mentality we must try to get rid of it and to that end we require sympathy, the thorough study of the situation, the establishment of intimate relation and mutual help. There are however other reasons for this separatist tendency of the hills people. On the border of our neighbouring country Burma some incidents have very often been taking place; and these have been creating a grave concern to them. As for instance we may mention the happenings in the Karen State. Now arises the question of the independence of Cochin. These naturally bring about some reactions in the minds of the hills people. There is another problem—the hills people of the same origin lying on both sides of the Indo-Burman border. The geographical boundary fails to mark a dividing line between them. There develops a sense of unity between them. In this case we may refer to the instance of seventeen thousand Naga States of Burma lying on the entire border of the Naga Hills district. The Kuki Nagas of Manipur also recently submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister to the effect that if possible, the hills people of the both side of the Government of India; for, when the people having the same origin and the same language are struggling all over the world to have their own government they are being divided by artificial boundary-lines and it does not augur well for the security of both India and Burma.

These things are giving us a clear warning that if we make delay in securing the political integrity of India we would fall out of the frying pan into the fire. But it must be admitted that our Constitution provides local autonomy to the six hill districts of Assam, for their interest and well-being. But besides these hill districts there are other hill districts wherein the Government is found to be lacking in political sagacity and is still following the former British policy.

The North East Frontier Agency covers an area of 35000 square miles. It has been divided into six districts. Millions of the people of this area have remained in the condition of the pre-historic time. This area has been placed under the Central Government according to the sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The Governor of Assam rules it as agent of the President of India. Even now it has not been possible to extend administration throughout the entire region. The area has been brought under the administration of the Centre on the plea that owing

to the state of great backwardness the people of this area it cannot be placed on the equal level of other hills people of India. Of course its political importance is seriously to be taken interest of.

The Sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly for the North East Frontier Agency and other excluded areas suggested that the Centre should run the administration of the Frontier Agency through the Government of Assam. But the suggestion had fallen flat and only the Governor was made the agent of administration. Now the Government of Assam has no power in the administration of this area. The Governor is doing whatever he likes so far as its administration is concerned.

PARALLEL GOVERNMENT

It is no exaggeration to say that a parallel Government of the Governor and the aristocracy has been formed in the Frontier Agency. The Government of Assam and its people are totally cut off from this area. Still the '*pass system*' is in force. There is no relation at all with the plains. The Centre desires the speedy development of this area. But who cares what is happening there? It is true that many roads, hospitals and schools have been established there; but the workers of development are not being done in proportion to the huge amount of money spent. Various rumours of corruption are being heard as regards the money spent for various purposes. But the publicity department of the Government is giving reports of various developments. If various developments including communication were being made then why did the Government fail to furnish us with information of the damages we required of the great earthquake of 1950? Now a horrible news has been received from the Misimi Hills that the officers there have been starving for more than a month because there is no communication to that area. If the officers have to undergo such horrible suffering then the condition of the mass can easily be guessed. How far the Government has been successful in giving the least possible supply of food to that area now remains to be speculated. In this connection it may be added that monetary grants for the development of this area is received late from Delhi.

NO CO-OPERATION

So far as our knowledge goes the Government is not getting the sincere co-operation of the hills people. There are some factors responsible for this. This hills people are very suspicious and easily frightened. So we must try to win their heart through mutual exchange of love. But sometimes we get some reports that some officers in charge of repairing or building roads in that area handle the labourers very badly for remaining absent from work. The labourers try to make the officers understand that on account of their Bihu festival they failed to attend their work. But the officers do not have any patience to listen to their explanation. In many cases such minor incidents produce reactions adversely against co-operation. Persons who have no good knowledge of the hills people must not be entrusted with such responsibility.

DIARY

Diaries of the Government officers play an important part in providing their efficiency. Their diaries give more of the descriptions of their hazardous tour through the dense hilly jungles than what they have done for the good of the people in the interior parts. To some officers the idea of cordial relation with the hills people does not go beyond chatting or dancing with them over a cup of Apong, or taking food with them in the same plate. They do not feel the necessity of removing the bad habits and customs from among them.

OH! ELWIN

Some people are trying to open some training centres among the hills people—let us hope,—not with some ulterior motive behind this! Dr. Verier Elwin said that the persons to work among the hills people must be very carefully selected. He further said that those who come forward to work among the hills people or to give them education must have a high sense of morality and be able to show good examples of life and work, otherwise the simple and unsophisticated people would be following their bad examples and be led astray.

THE SPECIALITIES OF BUREAUCRACY

The Centre relies on bureaucracy. The administration of the N.E.F.A. is now in the hands of these bureaucrats. They are not bound to give any explanation to the public for their mal-administration. It needs no repetition in what spirit of service the bureaucracy in the N.E.F.A. runs its administration. Those with a true spirit of service to work among the hills people and with a burning desire to develop their hills brethren in all respects should have been sent to work there. But the Central Government, it seems, does not like to think in that way. Persons outside Assam have been specially selected to run the administration of this area. Only the officials of the Delhi Secretariate and Military men have been considered fit for this administration. It is a matter of great surprise that high ranking officials of the Centre came here like a westerly wind only to realise that the Assamese people and their language prove a stumbling block in the path of the development of this area. They became determined to oust the Assamese and their language from this area. In March 21, 1953 the Prime Minister declared in Lok Sabha that Assamese has been used the official language in those hill areas where it is understood. But we are greatly shocked to learn when Shri Kaul of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the Centre that the Assamese patriotic song *O Mor Aponar Desh* must be debarred from singing on any occasion in this area.

TWISTED PLANNING

Plans about its administration began to be secretly prepared in Delhi. As a result, the Assamese officers and the Assamese language had quickly to make room for the non-Assamese officers and the Hindi language. Finally a proposal was mooted to appoint a Commissioner with full responsibility for the Agency. An altogether separate department was organised for those who served in the hill areas. But what do all these indicate? It became crystal clear that the Centre is not at all willing to integrate this area with Assam nor does it like to run its administration through the Assam Government instead of the Governor as its agent as at present. Like the British predecessors the Centre is firmly determined not to allow the Assamese to come in contact with their hills brethren, maintain all the

separatist provisions and regulations and establish bureaucracy on a firm and lasting basis.

LEST THEY BECAME CONSCIOUS

The Central Government does not seem to like that the frontier people should be conscious of the modern world; nor does it appear to like that they should be allowed to enjoy the privileges of democracy. The Government wants to satisfy them only with roads and hospitals. It keeps a vigilant eye on the Assamese people in their contact with the hills people. The Centre thinks that the hills people would be politically conscious by coming in contact with the Assamese. Now the democratic Government in the Centre is losing confidence of the people of Assam. Even to-day the hills people are being kept in the same backward condition as they were in seventy years ago. How long they would continue to remain in this condition—it is difficult to say.

Like the North West Frontier of India the North East Frontier makes an important chapter in the history of India. In ancient times there had been influxes of diverse people to India through the North East Frontier; but those people could adjust themselves with the children of the soil. So they were not like those invaders who entered India through the North West Frontier and spread themselves upto the Gangetic Valley by ravaging almost entire northern India. The Burmese entered Assam through the north east corner of India and made similar horrible devastations in Assam; but the historians have not laid much importance on their invasion and considered it a mere passing event of Assam.

The second great world war had increased the strategic importance of the North East Frontier. Its importance had much more been increased by the political upheavals of some countries lying near it. The communist government had been formed in China and as a result of it Tibet had fallen into the grip of the Chinese Liberating Forces. The political instability of Burma has been shaking her. These happenings of the neighbouring countries have made the government of India very much cautious of the defence of the North East Frontier. The government has to keep a careful look on the political changes of the neighbouring countries. The government still follows the

British policy in the administration of the North East Frontiers for the simple reason that it wants to take stern measures against the political ideologies of the bordering countries so that they cannot influence the mind of the Indian people.

The government does not like to run the administration of the frontier area with the co-operation of its people—rather it appears that it relies more on bureaucracy so far as administration of this area is concerned. *'The Statesman'* wrote in support of the government that as a result of the Chinese domination over Tibet it was utmost important to keep a sharp eye on the Indian states lying near the Macmahon Line.

THE PROBLEMS OF THE FRONTIER

Of course, there are a host of problems connected with the Frontier. The changes taking place outside the boundary (of our country) have added to the complicity of the problems. Without a reference to these problems the article would be incomplete.

(1) The barbed wire meant to encircle the impassable N.E.F.A. cannot divide the two people—the artificial veil is the real boundary of this area. In days gone by, the British instituted this artificial curtain solely in positional consideration of military out-posts. The British did this by entering into a compromise. A similar consideration was kept in view while extending the administration into these areas. This was not initially admitted—there was simply a report that extension of this administration into these areas might arouse suspicion in the minds of the neighbours. Even the Macmahon Line was also based on similar considerations. This line also is purely an artificial one. That is not all. In 1914 China, Tibet and Britain entered into an agreement at a conference held to determine the boundary of the Frontier. The outcome is this Macmahon Line. But sometime later, the then Government of China, the Kuo-Min-Tang started disapproving the provisions of this agreement. China's being a party thus became meaningless. Loopholes were detected in that agreement.

(2) It is worth mentioning here that the Chinese Ministry of Broadcasting etc. published a 'handbook' during the Second World War wherein was mentioned that the Chinese boundary

touches the Brahmaputra nearabout the west of Sadiya. But the maps of the Government of India show the boundary as somewhere from the North-East Vortex of Bhutan along the Dehing river. No one knows what shape this controversy of the Kou-min-tang regime turns out to be in the present Communist set-up.

(3) There are certain other facts connected with the Frontier of Tibet worth noticing. Some roads leading to Tibet fall within the area of Assam. One such road passes from Udalguri to Lhasa. This is the shortest road. The road crosses places like Amratala, Dhirangjing. There are Tibetan Military Outposts at Dhirangjing. In addition to this there are two other roads but they are not much in use at present. One passes through the Abor Hills and the Dehing Valley and the other through the Mishimi Hills. That road reaches Jiul of Tibet across Rima. The Government has kept close attention to this road. Judged from a strategic standpoint, these roads will possibly outweigh and be more important than the people of this area.

(4) The fact that the people of Sher and Rupa villages in the Balipara Frontier Tract owe allegiance to Tibetan monasteries also needs attention in the light of new diplomatic developments. Another point that needs particular mention is that the Government of India paid Rs. 5,000/- (as tribute?) to the monastery at Toweng. There were interpellations in the Parliament about the question of national dignity involved in this payment. The monasteries of Tibet do not seem to recognise any line of demarcation between religion and politics. It is therefore still a mystery what will be the attitude of new Tibet to this question of vital importance.

Of course, India has accepted Chinese suzerainty over Tibet although this recognition is merely in name, not in actual practice. The fact that an Indian mission was established directly in Lhasa in 1936 goes to establish this nominal recognition. But things are completely changed after the so-called liberation of Tibet and India meanwhile has withdrawn direct relationship with Tibet as aforesaid. The opening of a consulate in Tibet in place of the old India Mission also opened up a new chapter in the Indo-Tibetan relations. No one knows its ultimate results, but the problems referred to above naturally prick the mind very often.

INFILTRATION

Considering all these facts the Government must take every possible defence measure. But the question is what steps will be possible to take against foreign invasions or intrusion of political ideals. Can the policies now formulated depriving the people concerned of their democratic rights and instituting iron curtain of diehard bureaucrats be dependable measures of defence? Many frontier Part 'C' States have been deprived of these democratic principles on the plea of their strategic positions, and the situation in all these is certainly not favourable. It behoves us to learn by experience.

SUSPICIOUS NEIGHBOURS

During the British regime the unadministered areas were kept under close vigilance and this was so far obvious suspicions about the neighbours. Apprehending that Tibet would look with suspicion this expansion of this administration to further North, the old Government of India refrained from such a venture. The same apprehension perhaps still persists.

THE SLIPPERY ROAD

If the present Frontier policy of the Government is based on their attitude to Communism, why should not our Government look at the ideals of International Communism? If the people of a frontier area is kept isolated by a total denial of all democratic rights how will our Government be able to counter the ultimate opportunism of communism? International Communism always prefers a slippery road. History is replete with instances to establish this fact. If our aim is to accept Counter Communism, then where would lie the benefits of withholding the democratic rights of the people? It is a different thing if Sri Nehru wants to demand strongly—drawing inspiration from the Divine Right that "the king can do no wrong"; but if he does not do that then it is our firm conviction that he will have to admit these things as events of reality.

LET NEHRU UNDERSTAND

That is why we frankly urge the Government that it make amends. No one has ever thought for the larger interest of Assam. The movement that is brewing at present in Assam is

not based on what is called 'provincialism' of a handful of Assamese. Let Nehru understand this simple fact. It is the main thing at present to instil in the minds of the people of the Frontier Agency the fact of national integration. In connection with the present movement in Assam a few tribal people express their opinion "that efforts are being made by the Government to merge forcibly the Frontier Area with Assam without ascertaining the hopes and aspirations of the tribal people." Does it mean that Sri Nehru is fully content with the inklings of the tribal people? That would certainly happen so long this area is kept in isolation.

The second thing is that the public cannot be kept untouched by any current of thought by means of a projected cover. The duty of the Government under the circumstances is that they should try to take the people (of Assam) into confidence. Let them give the public the privilege of testing democracy. Let them allow the public to ascend the ladder of progress.

* Translated from the original Assamese by Sri Manick Chandra Borgohain.

MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE GOVERNOR OF ASSAM

By The Tribal Students of N.E.F.A.

Reverend Sir,

We, the tribal students of Margherita Basic Training Institute hailing from different parts of the N.E.F.A. region take the liberty of presenting the following facts for your kind perusal. We fervently hope you would try to take proper remedial measures for the same. Otherwise, there is every likelihood of our progress and prosperity being retarded. A few opinions already expressed by some self-seeking persons for their own interest will never express the real feelings of the entire tribal population.

When we speak of the original inhabitants of Assam we generally mean the tribal people, such as the Kacharis, the Nagas, the Miris, the Mishimis, the Khasis, the Garos, the Lushais, the Abors, the Singhfows, the Khamtis, the Mikirs, the Dafias, the Apatanis etc. Then we refer to the Ahoms, the Chutias, the Fakials, the Naras, people who came to Assam after the said inhabitants of the land and caused a mixed harmony among the inhabitants of the plains and their tribal counterparts in the hills. The different peoples that came to Assam earlier also took to the learning of Assamese in spite of their having own dialects with a view to building a strong Assam. Many a tribal words is to be found in Assamese.

That is why, before the invasion of the Britishers, Assam was unconquerable. Assam was under the subjugation of the alien rule only for a period of hundred and twenty years. During that period a happy relationship existed between the plains and the tribal people. Even marriages took place between

these two people. Several instances can be cited to substantiate the above arguments.

Every scion of the hill people or hill tribe has its own different dialect. Only when they talked two people belonging to different tribes talk in their own respective dialects.

On the contrary, however, when one tribe holds conversation with another tribe the medium of communication is wholly Assamese. Apart from the people of NEFA, the peoples of the Garo Hills, the Mikir Hills, the Lushai Hills, the Naga Hills—all these people are tribal people. It is for this reason, that the people of the NEFA area should not live separately from their counterparts in the aforementioned hills.

The tribal people inhabiting the NEFA region always have to keep close touch with the plains people for the supply of their bare necessities of life. That is why, we should always endeavour to adopt such a path that would ensure that relationship. It is not easy for the NEFA Areas to be independent in matters of food and other things of daily requirement. In order to procure these things they always have to go to the plains. If we are to proceed on the path of progress then we, perforce, have to keep a good relationship with our neighbouring people. Also, it is the plains people who can set an ideal for us to strive. But instead of taking all these positive facts into account the administrators are trying to lead us on a different path. We, therefore, place before you the following facts, so that you do the needful by keeping an eye to these things. We want that, despite introduction of Hindi, or other languages, Assamese should be introduced in the Primary Schools of the tribal areas as had been the case previously along with the mother tongue. The books on Basic Training Scheme that are being prepared at present should be translated into Assamese, in Assamese script. The Government of India, without having consultation with and without obtaining any opinion of the people of the tribal areas, have, all on a sudden, ordered teaching of Hindi in the Primary Schools from Class I. Moreover, it is a matter of regret that it has prohibited the students and teachers from talking in the Assamese language in schools. We, therefore request you kindly to concede to the following demands.

1. We beg to impress upon you that the medium of instruction in the schools of the NEFA areas be Assamese as was the

case formerly, and the dialect be written in Assamese script. Rashtrabhasa should be introduced from Class IV in the M. E. Schools. We, therefore, demand that the orders for imparting education through the medium of Hindi be abrogated.

2. Appointments in the Teaching Departments should not be given to persons who are not familiar with the Assamese language.

3. Proper measures should be adopted to extend the same privilege to the students of the NEFA areas as is given to other tribal students to participate in Games and Sports competitions held in the plains.

4. No tribal student be forced to undergo a training against his will till he passes the M. E. examination.

5. In every tribal area a High School be established and measures be taken for higher education.

6. During the periods of cultivation and harvesting, the people of the villages be stopped from being made porters for it hampers cultivation and consequently the want of food-stuffs is acutely felt.

7. The Department of Forestry has been increasingly active in the NEFA areas. The people of this particular area who have for ages been hunting, catching fish, cutting wood have now to restrain themselves considerably from doing so. We, therefore demand that we be allowed to do, as we did formerly.

8. The contractors should stop the cutting of trees and sawing of timber which belong to the tribal people without having permission from the latter. If they at all have to cut, they should be required to pay an adequate compensation to the owner.

9. Permission should not be given to persons who come to open shops among the simple tribal folk. Also, measures should be taken to ensure that the tribal people can carry on business without obtaining Government permission.

10. The prevalence of the opium habit amongst the tribals should gradually be stopped and immediate steps be taken to arrest the unauthorised supply of opium.

11. The extra-privilege of hills allowance granted to the children of NEFA must also be granted to the children of Margherita.

Margherita.

Dated, 22nd May, 1957.

Yours respectfully

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|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Sri Bromting Tyeng. | 38. Sri Hawang. |
| 2. " Nanang Barang. | 39. " Ranjam Rangra. |
| 3. " Brarghdm Loong | 40. " Thowany. |
| 4. " Toofar Maisam. | 41. " Wavangan Ramvag. |
| 5. " Nawlak Maidam. | 42. " Kallal Ruwatu. |
| 6. " Tangju Taibam. | 43. " Lanang Taidang. |
| 7. " Telam Lowarg. | 44. " Runjavang. |
| 8. " Kateng Bo. | 45. " Uwangsam. |
| 9. " Ranuang Wangshu. | 46. " Watwamy. |
| 10. " Hangnu Jugali. | 47. " Uwangshi. |
| 11. " Tashan Maidan. | 48. " Kamkon. |
| 12. " Kupne Wangshu. | 49. " Kakut. |
| 13. " Uwangfa Rajkumi. | 50. " Tamat Chandra Bori. |
| 14. " Binram. | 51. " Dhasen Tyeng. |
| 15. " Sabin. | 52. " Lan Keen Petiy. |
| 16. " Sume Faigan. | 53. " Shandcsawr Bori. |
| 17. " Norgbong. | 54. " Lookut Barang. |
| 18. " Norgchow. | 55. " Tai Daye. |
| 19. " Young. | 56. " Tagung Kamut. |
| 20. " Rape Hang. | 57. " Tubdad. |
| 21. " Cham Khum. | 58. " Takap. |
| 22. " Cham Hum. | 59. " Talum Tndbang. |
| 23. " Uwang Sang. | 60. " Takam Divashee. |
| 24. " Revyang. | 61. " Lomtong Perme. |
| 25. " Kamin. | 62. " Weshtiu Bari. |
| 26. " Ywang Ran. | 63. " Tailiya Taipowdiya. |
| 27. " Kumake. | 64. " Tapang Gameng. |
| 28. " Kam Vang. | 65. " Tayar Ketam. |
| 29. " Riussin Dage. | 66. " Kamal Chandra Bari. |
| 30. " Buli Deri. | 67. " Tai Iyosh. |
| 31. " Eshe Dorje. | 68. " Tagam Tame. |
| 32. " Tak. | 69. " Pakan Rahau. |
| 33. " Dajee Fukter. | 70. " Geyan Salum. |
| 34. " Dajee Khancha. | 71. " Tanachak Madi. |
| 35. " Tudru Tnega. | 72. " Kang geng Dhayeng. |
| 36. " Teeshang Kekung. | 73. " Kar Sang Nodi. |
| 37. " Sani Pyeng. | 74. " Nandaram Wei. |

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|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 75. Sri Kudan Sat. | 99. Sri Tami Riba. |
| 76. „ Takar Reeme. | 100. „ Amme Lingi. |
| 77. „ Waklang Iyeng. | 101. „ Chushe Wena. |
| 78. „ Takar Reeme. | 102. „ Katiya Kishang. |
| 79. „ Tajum Ishi. | 103. „ Seta Mena. |
| 80. „ Thalam Wiri. | 104. „ Ofi Weleng. |
| 81. „ Lanbudhan Peting. | 105. „ Teshi Dema. |
| 82. „ Taduk Tatak. | 106. „ Tama Teki. |
| 83. „ Taika Kurme. | 107. „ Nawem Tana. |
| 84. „ Kalbum Katam. | 108. „ Dishi. |
| 85. „ Roongleen Tyeng. | 109. „ Keetong. |
| 86. „ Nikan Iyosh. | 110. „ Gent. Waki. |
| 87. „ Wakpak Reytan. | 111. „ Chajen Police |
| 88. „ Tashen Ate. | Khamanti. |
| 89. „ Adem Peyeng. | 112. „ Atem Daye Abor. |
| 90. „ Nudram Pong. | 113. „ Sigwa Iyokli. |
| 91. „ Nalum Tyeng. | 114. „ Nipe Sma. |
| 92. „ Teham Thangya. | 115. „ Talik Leg Abor. |
| 93. „ Thomren Toreng. | 116. „ Tawamatham. |
| 94. „ Tajum Basen. | 117. „ Tut tak Dafla. |
| 95. „ Tomi Riba. | 118. „ Loowak Toong |
| 96. „ Dakiram Kiling. | Iewengshu. |
| 97. „ Washi Lingi. | 119. „ Sun Tup Wishimi. |
| 98. „ Shoblong Tagyang. | 120. „ Tadiu. |

TRIP TO BOMDILA (Tourist's Diary)

Justice H. Deka

Bomdila is a very small place and very little known outside its own sphere. It is the present headquarters of Kameng Frontier Division of the N.E.F.A. Its altitude is 8,600 feet and is claimed to be the highest headquarters of a District in any part of India. Its temperature is extremely cold and easily goes down to 25° f.h. The average rainfall is about 100" in the year. The breeze is cold and freezing, and you get frost possibly for three months in the year. With drizzling, the sky becomes cloudy and you could hardly distinguish the dawn from the evening. The land is fertile and the look of the earth is just like compost manure itself. I have seen cabbages and nolkols running wild, and few people caring to pluck them. Maize is the general food of the local inhabitants—not of the people from the plains—and the forest logs still abound because the land has only been newly cleared for the purpose of the head-quarters of the District. The food for the people, particularly the officials and the army squad, is supplied by air-dropping and naturally, therefore, it is confined to few items. Local people draw on ration cards, possibly rice, kerosene and salt. This is undoubtedly a very meagre description of the place, but this is what can be said in a nutshell about its physical conditions.

Some persons may be legitimately curious to know what made me go to such a place, and what reasons on earth could make me love it. I have possibly some love for the wilderness, because it may be in our blood, as the scientists say. I heard from a friend casually sometime back that Bomdila is a place newly opened up as the headquarters of Kameng Frontier Division. It was said to be fairly high and fairly cold. I thought

of going myself alone, but subsequently two of my children joined my company, and with the kind assistance of the Adviser to the Governor, Mr. K. L. Mehta, I.C.S., I formed a link for stepping up to the forbidden region—forbidden in the sense that nobody can get into an 'inner line' without a pass, and much has been talked about it in the Legislative Assembly. Subsequently my programme was fixed up and information sent to the Political officer through and Adviser's office.

On the evening of the 29th October last, a very unassuming gentleman came and called me at the Tezpur Circuit House just to know when I would like to leave the next day for the Kameng Frontier Division. We fixed up the programme for the next day to leave Tezpur for the foot-hill camp about 1 P.M. The unassuming nature of the gentleman would be clear from a very simple incident. In the evening of the 29th October, I was inside a variety show, and the gentleman from Bomdila asked one of the highly placed officials, whether I was in and whether he could contact me. The officer asked the gentleman about his mission, whereto he replied that it was more or less of a personal nature. The officer was not impressed by the look of the N.E.F.A. gentleman and suspected that there might be something wrong, and he shouted for the Police, then alone the N.E.F.A. official disclosed his identity. The reason was that the gentleman was very unassuming in nature and had not the smart trimming up. However, he proved to be a very pleasant companion to us and he was Mr. T. Imti, one of the Assistant Political Officers.

The foot-hill camp is a beautiful place situated at a distance of about 52 miles from Tezpur by the bank of a small river or hill-stream known as Belsiri, which gathers its force in the summer and has a weak existence in the winter except that the spring produced a gargling sound sweet and attractive. We were located for the night at the Army Canteen, but had the privilege of dining at the Army Mess under the leadership of Major S. Kar who happened to be the nephew of one of my friends in Calcutta and saw me as a practising Advocate while he was a school or college student. Major Kar is a fine and lovable young man, healthy and intelligent and entrusted with road making. The other Army officers whom we met, were all of a very kindly nature.

The Chaku Camp :

Next morning Major Kar was good enough to pick us up in his jeep, and Mr. Imti, with the Base Superintendent, Mr. B. C. Gogoi, followed us up to the Chaku camp, where we got down from the jeep and took leave of Major Kar. Major Kar is undoubtedly a good engineer, as the difficult road itself would prove, but he is possibly a still better driver, because he drove the car with such skill in such a bad road as few would have the chance of seeing. He was good enough to tell us at the time of parting that he would be waiting for our return and that the message might be sent to him a day or two earlier.

A SANATORIUM

While driving up to the Chaku camp, we stopped at a place known as Bumpoo, where there is a small camp for one or two army officers to supervise road-making. The place is astoundingly charming, the climate is undoubtedly a bit cold, it being at a height of about 7,000 feet from the sea level, but the view that it presents is simply marvellous, if not stupendous. With an army officer we roughly calculated that it presented a panoramic view of about four hundred square miles up to the Brahmaputra and beyond. One could see six or seven rivers flowing up to the Brahmaputra through a green valley of enormous size. The thing is, we were on the top of a hill which represents a beautiful sight of the open space towards the south, the east and the west, the north alone being blocked. There are few adjoining small hillocks of the same height, and if the place is opened up and converted into a hill station, it holds out a beautiful prospect of development as a sanatorium. Food will be easy to get because the road passes that way, and the climate is very bracing. There was not a single inhabitant so far we could see in that part of the country, because it was in the fastness of the hills of the Himalayan range. That the Himalaya is a child in age, compared to other hills, not to speak of mountains, can roughly be estimated even by a layman by looking at the slabs that mostly form the hills by which we passed. They are not as hard as the rocks in Kamakhya or in Urvashi (near the Deputy Commissioner's Court at Gauhati) and how we wished, while covering up the dusty road, that the slabs might soon form into

rocks and make the road a firm one where land-slides are not too uncommon.

PERILA

From the Chaku camp a new chapter began, and we bade adieu to our so-called civilised world. We had a hurried meal at a tent fixed up by the Kameng authorities, and were presented with four ponies for our ride—one for Mr. Imti and three for my company. My son was young and he rather liked the ride as he had only tried stray ponies since his adolescence. My daughter was a bit shy as she was unused to a pony at any time of her life, and I, for myself, except as a schoolboy, had nothing to do with a horse. I was practically pushed up to the saddle, my daughter was helped, and my son jumped with glee. Mr. Imti was an able horseman and very much used both to the road and the pony. Every horse had an attendant. While the horse shied, the conductor gave a push or a pull and the animal grudgingly advanced. My stirrups were not properly adjusted and within half an hour I developed pain in my knees, and I began suspecting whether I had not developed rheumatism. I complained to Mr. Imti who asked me to get down. I limped for a time and got up the pony again without telling him where the shoe pinched. Another twenty minutes made me uncomfortable, and this time only I complained about the shortness of the strap to which the stirrups hung. We had not really the mastery of the situation, but the horse had; it jumped when it had to, and very often grazed the side of the hill with stony spurs, and I was every minute afraid of a sprained knee, apart from its pains. We got to a height of about ten thousand feet or above, and the peak is known as Perila. La, I understand, means a pass or a *girisankat*. I would rather like to call it 'Perilous' because of the cold and bizarre look that it has. On the other hand, I was glad to know that we would not have to ride any more. I got down from my pony with a sigh of relief, and walked down to a place known as Jabrang. It was possibly a little less than eight thousand feet high, and there we stopped for the night. There were a few houses with thatch coverings, and the place was used as a camp or rest-house for the officers of the Kameng Frontier Division. It was a station where you could change porters or horses if you wanted to do so. A big fire was burning

inside the house, around which we sat down for a cup of coffee and some food that were hurriedly prepared. The snack consisted of bread and biscuits, boiled beans and cabbage. We ate with great appetite and waited till our evening meal. The night was rather cold, but the morning following was pleasant and we could see Rupa in the plains below whereto we would be soon moving. The Himalayan ranges higher up presented a beautiful sight with their snow-covered peaks absorbing the radiant hue from the rising sun.

JABRANG

After breakfast, I rode to Rupa with Mr. Imti, my children chosing to walk down the hill. Rupa was clearly visible from Jabrang and even Bomdila.

RUPA

Rupa is a beautiful place, which we reached at about ten in the morning of the 1st of November. Before we entered the village, the local *gaonbura*, with few other leading villagers and some officials of Kameng Hills, consisting of gents and ladies, were good enough to wait for us at a place about a mile off from the small township. I would have loved my trip even if I had terminated it at Rupa. There were a few acres of agricultural land which the local people possessed, and we saw their residential houses too. They cannot be said to be huts in a true sense, and they were much better built than most of our houses in the plains. Some of these houses are two-storeyed, the ground floor being used for cattle and the like, and the upper storey for residential purpose as well as for granary. The houses in other hills of Assam do not compare well with these strong built houses. The men and women are sufficiently healthy, and well covered up. They were said to be Sherdukpens—a class of Buddhists. Plenty of chillis were seen dried outside, and the cattle, including ponies, grazed freely. At the time we went, there were more stubbles than corns, and the fields had a withered look, except for some sort of vegetables of 'datha' class, whose seeds, I was told were meant for preparation of local drinks. I got down from the pony before the assembly that came to greet us, and they garlanded us with one or two white scarfs or *Chaddars*, it, which, I was told, was the local custom. They saluted us

the sort of *Namaskar* that we have here, and I returned their greetings with folded hands. There is an M. E. School, at Rupa, where one Mr. Aditya Sarma is the Head-Master, and there are a few more teachers; some of whom are possibly graduates. There is a Hindi teacher—I think Mr. Trivedi, from U.P., who was very good to us and joined with other officers in extending us a welcome. In the evening, we were invited to a variety show presented by the local people, where for the first time I heard the Bhutan melodies, if I might say so, and the local boys were singing '*milangeeti*' in perfect Assamese. There were local dances and songs, and some small children, including girls, took part in the same. Rupa is a beautiful valley surrounded by two hill streams, and looks like a silver casket, and the name Rupa is quite appropriately given. There are, I am told, other incidents from which the name Rupa was derived. It is better for me that I do not refer to those matters without having any record at my disposal, but, for the place itself I will have a soft corner, and for its calm and docile class of people who inhabit the land. The streams, as it were, sparkle in my memory.

THE GREETINGS

The next morning I changed my ride because the pony looked tired and, I was told it developed a sore on the back. The journey undoubtedly was strenuous and the horses had to stand sufficient strain, Rupa is at a height of less than five thousand feet and its climate is very congenial and the place is sunny. One has only to climb two more hills to reach Bomdila which is not exactly at the hill-top, but just above the girdle. The road is rather steep and we negotiated the height slowly. There we came across a place where the hillock consists of marble-like slates, but unfortunately the slabs were not well-formed so that they could be removed. There is undoubtedly a possibility that thousands of years hence the marble might form into slabs, and another Tajmahal in memory of some beautiful maiden may be constructed by some willing hands in those hills or near about. If you think I am too sanguine to think of a prospective Tajmahal, I can assure you that there will be prayer houses or community halls with marble floors and railings. Just after crossing the first hill, we had to pass through a low region

and then start climbing again. The great inconvenience was in fording a stream about thirteen times over, and then we got into the clearings which paved the access to the new jeepable road that was being constructed under the supervision of the able Political Officer. I understand it was Major Khatting, the outgoing Political Officer, one of the able Naga officers at whose initiative the space was opened up and the headquarters was located. It was undoubtedly a relief to ride through the widened road without much of jumping, which we had to do while fording the stream. We dismounted at the portal of the township, and the horses also heaved a sigh of relief. A small group, headed by the Political Officer, Major Randhir Singh Nag, awaited our arrival and were very much cheered by their kindly presence. Major Nag came forward and put a scarf round my neck in accordance with the local custom, as he said, and I felt a genial warmth at the reception because the persons present did not wear the courtesy smiles seen mostly in official receptions. The small crowd closed in and I at once felt the warmth of a hearth and a home. Officials were really few and they could be counted on fingerends. My subsequent stay and close contact with them made me consider them to be almost members of my family. Mrs. Nag, (Major Nag's wife) was undoubtedly the leading lady. Mrs. Yadav (wife of Major Yadav) was another elderly lady, with a calmly grace, Mrs. Khuma (wife of the Assistant Political officer, Grade I) was a lady from the Lushai Hills—half between the past and the present. There were a number of young ladies—Mrs. Imti, Mrs. Chari, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Roy and few others. I met Mrs. Hangsha Vyas a little later through her husband, Sri Chandra Kant Vyas, who was in my company from Rupa. Chandra Kant Vyas, the Base Superintendent, is a fine M.A. of the Nagpur University with a Gujrati ancestry, and so is his wife possibly with a degree from the Poona University. I have had the chance of seeing for the first time Mrs. Nag at Rupa, while she was passing with hurricane speed to play the hostess for my poor self, which, I must admit, she did admirably. Major Nag is at the same time hardy and soft, heavy and light. Hardy, because he is a military with a robust constitution; soft, because he has a fine heart and very cordial manners; heavy, in the sense that he is a hard task-master, and light in the sense that he has a fine sense of humour and understands a joke. His grip was

warm, and manner of exposition very vivacious. He has his heart in the work.

THE JOURNEY'S END : BOMDILA

We were escorted, after the ladies and gents were introduced to us, to Major Nag's bungalow, which is a thatched shed with not much of ado about it except that a flower garden made the whole spot attractive. We were lodged in a small guest-house attached to his residential bungalow, and we continued to be his guests till we took our leave on the morning of the 8th of November.

THE CALLINGS

Major Nag had made a sort of programme for my calling on the institutions that existed in the small township. I, with him and Major Yadav, went round the military barracks where the Jawans of the Assam Rifles were located; they do Police duties there. I remember the bugle-boy who is also a fine dancer, their kitchen and club. I had a chance of dropping at the local civil hospital, more or less filled with chronic cases, excepting that one woman who hurt herself on her head one evening while pulling out a trunk and caused sufficient nightmare and anxiety to the Political Officer, Major Nag, and undoubtedly to the doctor, for a night. When I called at her bed, I found her comparatively better. I met the doctor, the midwife and a young nurse. Doctor Saha is an intelligent young man,—I remember his eyes; the midwife was a girl from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the young adroit nurse was from the Mizo Hills. I remember the Doctor and the nurse keeping a vigil in connection with a case in a soldiers' barrack, when a scion of the race was expected. In company with Major Nag, I called at the Cottage Industries, and there I found various branches of arts and handicrafts, including agriculture. I could see there wood-carvings by a local expert, smithy and soap-making etc., under the guidance of young Shome, nicknamed as "Sunlight Shome" (a tireless singer too)—and the weaving, spinning and knitting under the supervision of Mrs. Das, a young lady from Shillong. I understand, one Mr. Sarma was in charge of the whole administration of the Cottage Industries branch, but at that time he was not there. After going round the working in several centres of activity, including the young office assistants'

messes, I had had a talk with Major Nag who furnished me with great details as to the nature of work that was being done in the District, including establishment of hospitals in several centres. We were entertained further with some musical performances, and one of those functions was arranged by the local inhabitants who came from some distance from Bomdila. I remember the *gaonbura* from Dirangjang who was a very healthy looking man and spoke Assamese with the naturalness that belongs to the people of the plains. We have had tea and food with the officials who were there, and they expressed in a meeting very kind sentiments about our visit to the place. One Mr. Leela Datta was the Head Clerk of the Political Officer's office, with experience of no less than twenty offices, I am told. Mr. Datta, though about fifty, danced with commendable grace when the Bihu dances were presented. He is active, mobile and cheerful. I remember almost all the officers whom I met, and remember their kindly faces,—even the muscle display of a 'body beautiful'—Rajkhowa. One Mr. Mitra who, I was told, had his family in Hooghli, was one of those promising lights who worked incessantly for the betterment of the township by laying out roads. Mr. Rajagopalachari, popularly known as "Chari", said to be an engineer, distinguished himself more by the art of photography and very kind and attractive manners. His wife is an able counterpart—both speaking Assamese with commendable ease. The social atmosphere, taken as a whole, is both liberal and lively. Rupa atmosphere is also fresh and of a healthy tone.

I need not go into the details of the administration, of which I had some information through the kind assistance of the Political Officer who had trekked about seven hundred miles through the unchartered region, if I might say so, and had submitted an elaborate report about his activities to the External Affairs Ministry. That he has thoroughly identified himself with the work, I have no doubt, and it is undoubtedly not for me to commend his personality or his activities to the authorities that be.

ASSAMESE LANGUAGE : ATTITUDE OF THE AUTHORITIES

One thing that struck me was that there was some misgivings amongst some people, both there and outside, that the Assamese people or their language had not been given fair

encouragement in the N.E.F.A. area. I would like to desist from expressing any opinion as to the employment, because that is no concern of mine, but, so far as the language is concerned, I think it is a fact that the instruction from the External Affairs Ministry is that the tribes should be encouraged to have the first stage of their education through their own local tongues and then to learn Hindi. The reading of Assamese, as such, has not been encouraged unless the people themselves would like to read it. The difficulty for me is that I, being an Assamese, should not like to be a party to any controversy, but if I could speak as an outsider, I might speak with confidence that possibly the encouragement to learn Assamese would be of greater assistance to the local people than having their secondary education through the medium of Hindi, as is being the policy now followed there. It will be easier for them to pick up Assamese as most of the people whom I met and who came forward to talk to me, knew and could speak Assamese with comparative ease. I do not remember to have met any Dafla leader except those in the plains in the Charduar region, but the Mompas, Shardukpans, Khowas, and Akas, whom I met, spoke to me in Assamese just as any of our hill neighbours would do. It shall be easier for them to realise the oneness with the plains through the Assamese, which is essential for taking them out of their exclusiveness with a view to merge into a bigger nation.

I was told that it was only in the Twang area where Assamese was much less in vogue, those people having direct connections with Tibetan regions rather than with the people in the plains in the south. I was told, it would take about a fortnight, if not more, to touch the Twang area and come back and, therefore, I did not venture to see the Twang Monastery, though I felt an attraction. Major Nag expressed very high opinion about the assertive and self-respecting type of the Daflas who inhabited the eastern part of the Kameng Frontier Division. Road-making is in progress with the help of the Central Government, and when communication becomes easy, the development and spread of education will be speedier, and the co-merging of the people will take a tangible shape. The place, as it stands, is now inaccessible and the different classes of people are mostly left to their own resources, to grow and live and fight against the exigencies of time.

My note is not purported to be a report, but is just the diary of a traveller (though I keep no diary) who had an open mind and a love for the people as they stand. I could offer them nothing that is really tangible except to tell them that I was there to meet them. In one of the social meets, where I was a guest of the local people, I was offered a cup of *Jiu* or local beer, and a girl pressed a cup full of the liquid to my lips. The local custom, I was told, was to pull the guest by the ear, if he was reluctant to accept the small gift, and press it down his throat. My ears were undoubtedly spared, and the girl instead offered me a smile along with the cup of *Jiu*, wherein my lips were dipped, and I found the taste to be rather bitter.

Our people generally are not well informed about the people who live in those areas. They are not backward, as we commonly call them, except that they have no education through English or that they do not know much of reading and writing. They have a love for jewellery, mostly silver. I met a number of Aka woman heavily loaded with silver strings and *madulis* (loquets). There were *poalmonies* too. The workmanship was very fine, particularly in the silver scabbards of the small swords that some of the leaders wore. The *topis* (caps), I was told, were brought from the Twang side and they were of real felt leather and very warm and cosy. The earthen work had not made much progress and the process in vogue is very dilatory. The people mostly use wooden and bamboo crockeries and some of them are very gaily painted. The Daflas, I was told, were expert in cane work, and they make strong hanging bridges with the help of canes. Daimara is a place few miles off from the foot-hills where the tribals come down for a sort of seasonal market, which lasts for about three months in a year, and it is there that a good deal of barter is done between the people of the plains and the hills. When I left Bomdila, I surely left it with a heavy heart, because unless things improved, particularly the communication, there was little hope of seeing it once again, howsoever kind my hosts had been or howsoever gaily the flowers danced.

I make one more comment and stop. In my opinion, Bomdila is not a proper place for a headquarter. Its climate is extremely cold and trying. The people think,—rather have to think, more about the climate than about the work at hand.

The office assistants, though mostly young people, can hardly do without a fire-pot by their side while in office in the early winter. In the evening, none dares come out. A good number of clerks and office assistants have left their families in the plains. Assuming they are middle aged and have quite a number of children, they cannot be expected to live like that. The reason is scarcity of food and the unwholesome cold that pinches the body. You do not find children playing in the streets or even in the compounds because of the cold. Surely a little cold may be good for health, but not the extreme cold that we experienced. In the summer, I am told, it is no better because of the torrential rains, and the mud that follows. There is no good stream for drinking water, nor the possibility of a 'maidan' either.

Rupa would have been a much better place for a head-quarter town, and I could infer that the original plan was to have the headquarters at Rupa. The amount of money that is proposed to be spent in extending Bomdila for making it habitable, would give possibly better returns if the same were invested at Rupa or at Dirrangiang, which, I was told, has almost the same altitude as Rupa. If Bomdila is centrally situated, so is Dirrangiang, and Rupa is not far off the centre. There will be no water scarcity, and the small town may be electrified by hydraulic generators. I would, therefore, earnestly recommend to the authorities that before the whole thing is settled and more money is invested, no matter by whom, everything should be gone into in detail and a decision arrived at after level considerations. Altitude, by itself, is no matter for pride.

My visit to Bomdila was purely personal and out of a love for the unknown than for anything else in particular. The Judicial administration, in which I am interested, has not much progressed, and I would, therefore, make no comment.

ADIEU, BOMDILA!]

I wish the people of Kameng Division and the pioneers working at Bomdila township all luck and prosperity. I came back the way I went and looked back to the high hills from the foot-hills. At a short distance from the foot-hill camp, while coming, we came across a pair of lovely tigers—*Dhekia Patia* (Royal Bengal type, as is commonly known)—and one (the lady) waited on the road just for a minute, possibly to say good-bye.

A PEEP INTO THE COSTUMES OF THE TRIBAL PEOPLE OF THE N.E.F.A.

Sri Muktinath Bardoloi

Stretching over the whole of the Northern and Eastern flanks of Assam the North-East Frontier Agency comprises an area of 35,000 square miles, and it has a population of ten lakhs. The shape of this area is like, as it were, the 'Sutuli Pitha' (a kind of Cake exactly after the pattern of the horse-shoe). We come across as many as twenty tribes, to say the best, amongst the family of these aboriginals having distinct dialects, different manners and customs and wearing various kinds of dresses. Their tradition is itself a nice subject of research for the anthropologists. Although they appear to us as descendants of the Tibeto-Burman, the Tais, the Mongolians, etc., on a superficial view yet the respective specialities of the tribal people lie in their distinct dialects, their manners and customs and their dresses—a varied, rather paradoxical spectacle, yet at once beautiful for the art lovers and wonderful, on the other hand, to the unaccustomed eyes.

The main tribes of the Tuensang (Naga) Division consist of clans like the Semas, the Saangs, the Saangtams, the Foams, the Khingmungans, the Kanyaks, the Imsungars etc. The Noctes, the Tangsanga, the Wangshus, the Singphows etc., from the main tribes of the Tirap Frontier Division, while the Lohit Division has the Khamtis, the Mishimis, etc., as its major tribes. The Daflas, the Apatanis, the Miris constitute the major tribes of the Subansiri Division. The Abors are the major tribe of the Siang Division. Again, the Akas, the Sherdukpens the Manpas etc., are recognised as the major tribes of the Kameng Division. Though there appears many points of similarity among these

tribes, yet, every tribe possesses a speciality of its own. A certain tribe can be recognised from the type of dress it wears. That does not mean that dresses have got importance only because it enables us to recognise people. A great poet says—"The dress is the proper index of man"—Much in the same way can also be said that dress also presents before us a picture of the way of life of a certain nation. The same also applies in the case of these hill tribes. Civilisation has already brought about many changes in our dresses and costumes, but the speciality of the tribal people has so far remained as it is inspite of the impact of so called Civilisation. The colours of the dresses, the exquisite embroideries on clothes, the various ornaments—all these point to the aesthetic sense, simple taste and artistic mind of these tribal people. With the spread of administration and due to the light of education now imparted and due also to their close touch with outsiders, it is rightly feared, that their delightful colour-taste, their various ornaments, their simple dress may not last long. On account of the impact of this so-called civilisation, their fine own dresses will cease to exist and the tribal people will gradually begin to imitate the fashions of the unsophisticated. In course of time, who knows, their bodies will be completely beautified by modern dresses. Still then it is most essential that we should study and adore the culture of this large tribal family. The consideration and account of dresses are mainly relative. Nevertheless, it is possible to ascertain through many systems such as the social, the political, the cultural and the last but not the least economical. As a matter of fact the hills people wear less clothes and that too is very light or whatever garments, the people of the hills wear is very light of course. Is there any advantage in wearing the "Dhuti" upto the heels while ascending or decending a thousands feet high mountain or while cultivating lands after clearing thick woods? What is the use of "Trousers" or the "Chapkan" and the "Sherwanis" in doing these difficult works? There is more possibility of harm than good when people work and walk with dresses heavily on in places where cold is not so severe or where the rainfall is not very heavy. It has very often been seen that the number of men with skin diseases is greater among those who wear heavy clothes than among those who remain almost barebodied. This view is supported by many a

specialist. Civilisation has given the World, which was steeped in sheer barbarity, a thing called shame and a means to conceal it. That means is nothing but education in luxury of wearing fashionable dresses only. On the other hand, from the point of view of Ethics also, that the external cover is not the standard of one's moral life, is born but by the numerous examples of ills rampant in our present day 'Civilised' society.

In their society even if they have half-naked or completely—naked children of Nature we do not find there what is called in our 'Civilised Society' illegal marriage, abortion, birth-control etc. The women do not go down in shame if they are seen with their breasts bare, nor do the women who do not cover their secret parts. The Kafiris were once ridiculed as being half-naked before Gandhiji by some of his friends while he was in Africa. Gandhiji retorted that it was not the fault of the Kafiris rather it was the fault of the person who saw. To wear less clothes or no clothes at all is a custom of the Kafiris and it is their social convention, never mind if it appears to other people as something queer and incoherent. We arrogantly and falsely glorify in the name of Civilisation and call them uncivilised. It is said that barring prostitutes, no woman in the island of Bali covers her breasts. Similarly the girls belonging to such tribes as the Kanyaks, the Wangthus do not wear clothes. Still in the eyes of the society they live in, they are most natural & loyal to convention. The moment they wear clothes they will be regarded in their society as married. Even to think of what is going to be the fate ultimately of this divine system devoid of carnal desire as a result of the dissemination of knowledge by the so-called Civilisation is a matter of great regret. Therefore, in order to praise the costumes of the tribal people we must consider it in the light of their large-heartedness and fortitude. We happen to find the real beauty of the tribal costumes not in its gorgeousness and excessiveness but in its choice which has been discovered in keeping with Nature and also in accordance with their own needs. There is a social importance attached to costumes. Among the Nagas for example the important persons wear dresses different from the ordinary Nagas. This particular dress is called "Moor Ana Bir Saj." In like manner their ornaments are also different. The 'Thongs' meaning the important persons of the Sherdukpen tribe can wear a royal dress on special

occasions. The dress worn by the married women are also different in as much as it does not tally with that of the married girls.

The dress and costumes take shape in accordance with the needs of circumstances. This rule is applicable to all tribals. The people of the Kameng Division wear shirts with long sleeves and long pants in order to protect themselves from the bitings of 'Dah', (God fly). Similarly, the Tagins of the Abors Hills have to wear shirts made of animal hides and hats made of thick cane for the purpose of self-defence. So it can be said that in 'Jhumming' a light special kind of dress is required for the tribals to clear up jungles by setting fire into them, otherwise there is every chance of the dress getting soiled and felt uncomfortable. When looked at from this angle of vision, we will understand very easily why a nominal dress is so natural and so urgent in the hills. The dress they put on special occasions for the purpose of beautifying themselves, with embroideries and ornaments of all kinds, all these choices, go to point to the artistic mind of the tribal people. The "Head Hunting Dress" of the Nagas are beautiful and variegated. The beauty of the dress of the "Khungkhingans" which they wear while dancing is simply indescribable. Most of the dresses of the tribal people meant for special occasions and purposes are superb in their get-up. Apart from dresses, the way of making cues and the way they trim their hair is different from tribe to tribe. The manner, the Apatanis of Subansiri Division make their hair upon the foreheads, by knitting cues with a spindle made either of bamboo or bell-metal passed through it is pleasing to the eyes.

The Nagas and the Abors have bobbed hair. So many sayings, so many traditions have been associated with the hair-analysis of the Mishimis (Idus) who trim their hair rather in an un-even-fashion. The very way of their hair-trimming supplies us with ample proof of the tribe, the society to which it belongs and its conditions. For example the girls among the Kanyaks who wear long hair belong to the Royal family.

The hat is an integral part of the dresses and costumes of the tribal people. It is real beauty to see the Abors with the fine cane hats on their heads. Even in the European dress it suits well. We are simply amazed at the craftsmanship of the cane hats of the Mishimis. It really becomes a fine product when the

Daflas make their hats with flumes of bird exactly after the pattern of the English 'Night Cap.' The many coloured hats of the Nagas made of "Bir Nash" can very well be compared to the Crown of the Gods and Goddesses of the Hindus and to the Royal Crown, taking taste as the criterion.

The various and variegated ornaments of the tribal people are simply wonderful. There is a custom amongst different tribes to tattoo their bodies. Among the Muranabirs of the Kanyak tribe, we see various pictures of lines, dots, etc., marked on their faces and chests. This system is also prevalent among the Apatanis. It is known as "Ulki" among them (Tribal). The specialists hold that this system of tattooing was not only meant for the beautification of the body and for the aggrandisement of power and prestige alone; but any one willing to know its origin will find on the other hand that it was intended for self-defence and self-establishment also.

Our tribal brethren are fond of decorating the body right from the head down to the tips of their nails. (Do not the so-called civilised people do that?). The Kapali, the Kundan, the Bracelet, the Mattle etc., made out of silver by the Digaru Mishmi womenfolk are remarkable. Besides, there are to be seen bracelets made of cane and bamboo, socks, Muthikharus (a kind of large bangles worn by women specially in marriage), belts etc., of various types and colours. The coloured cane bracelets, the Muthikharus, the socks of the Nagas are very delicate and beautiful. The Karadhwani, the amulet that are in vogue among the Apatanis are in no way inferior compared to the designs of the ornaments of the plains people. The tusk of the elephant, the teeth of the bear, the tusk of the tiger, the various ivory bracelets beads etc., make ornaments made from them are exquisitely beautiful and decorative. Moreover many things such as the feathers of birds are so tastefully worn by the tribal people both on their hair and in their ears that against the background of verdant Nature filled with leaves, flowers birds etc., every one of these tribal people appear as a living part, as it were, of silent Nature; They are really the pet of Nature. The human society of the world has a relation with the dresses and costumes of the tribal people. If we are to understand that we must say that one of the important chapters of cultural development of human society has been kept shining by

the dresses and costumes of the tribal people, forming as they do, only a relatively infinitesimal part of the human society as a whole. But it is a subject for the anthropologists only. The different kinds of wear of the tribal people has certainly a contribution to the world of artistry. It can make the onward march of progress more pleasant by giving us fine taste, sense of æsthetics and by creating unity in diversity. But we are afraid, the electric speed of the Atomic Age, and the dangerous tendency of the decaying age of exploitation of the present day world may not allow these health and lively specimens of simple humanism to live, to thrive. Will the mordant scientific mentality and the Western capitalistic civilisation spare this simple, pure and beautiful way of life from those hungry polluting clutches? Or should we approve of the policy that this humble section of the progressive human family be kept always as a sphere of research for the anthropologists? It is my fervent appeal to the wise and sober section of the public to think about this matter deeply keeping in view the conflict between Gandhism and the Age of machine. One of the ablest of Rajyapals once said with regret and intense patriotism thus "Each varied culture of the various people of India is, as if a flower plant, and with their happy bleeding a garden would remain glittering for ever."

In New India an equal status has been envisaged for the tribal people with that of others, and if we are to realise that end, we must take such measures as would ensure its growth. It runs counter to the interest of the tribal people nay of the national interest of India, to try to isolate the North-East Frontier Agency as a museum. The spontaneous relationship which will grow as a result of our healthy attitude towards them, mutual respect for each other and the principles of unity will surely contribute not only towards their culture, their various dresses and costumes, their well-built social system, their moral ideal, but it will also pave the way for a permanent unity by prevailing upon the Indian culture as well, let alone costumes. This must be the attitude of all that in having that understanding of mutual give and take, there does not appear the mutual, there does not appear the parasitical attitude on the part of the other. It is not difficult, I believe, to take one Mishimi garment, a piece of Naga cloth, an Abor cap, one Manpa shoe as parts of the Indian dress. With development of the weaving industry it is

not at all impossible to except development of this broad outlook among the people in the plains. Even for the Officers already serving in the NEFA., it will not be impossible to use tribal costumes and adopt their manners and customs. But if we approach them with a narrow outlook of superiority complex and an ignominious feeling of suspicion instead of a healthy attitude and a generous attention towards them, then it will surely do tremendous harm to these poor children of India and will cause a set-back in their usual process of growth and development. It will be good if the Assamese people give serious thought and attention about this matter. Mere speeches from the platform and the publication of articles in the newspapers and magazines will lead us nowhere unless we are able to appreciate the position of tribal culture in the great temple of Indian culture and unless we try to welcome the tribal costumes by setting before them an ideal and a programme of constructive works as well.

A PEEP INTO THE RELIGIOUS SONGS AND DANCES OF THE N.E.F.A. PEOPLE

Mrs. Hemalata Borah

To know the religion of the people living in the Himalayan hills adjacent to Assam, one is to look into the ancient stories and myths of the places upon which are based primarily their religion and social activities. The religious discourse of these hill people are enrooted in deep thoughts. Their ancient stories and myths and philosophical ideas are distinct from those of the Hindu religion and they express a great depth of their mind and wisdom. They do not forget but worship the past glories of their ancestors—their sacrifice and determination. The different tribes have got deep faith in and sincere devotion to the religion with which they are differently associated in different places. The basis of their religion is prayer to God. This vast universe is ruled by that great Almighty. In addition to prayer their religion is associated with sincere hospitality, truth, honesty and amiability and they are proud of bestowing them. Without these virtues life is a disgrace, devoid of glory and this draws the curtain of fear for religion. From their religion they derive the true realism of life. Realism is the basis of their religion, there is not even a tinge of imagination and sentiment in it. A loving home—that is the religion and aspiration is the base. After death—in the next world—a similar life is aspired. A loving home is waiting in the next world provided a right path is followed in this world. They believe in rebirth and think that the soul of the dead takes its rebirth in the same family. Nobody desires to be a convert to become a Hindu or a Muslim or a Buddhist or a Christian who has got the touch of love and affection, respect and devotion. It is a fact that many tribals,

the Nagas, Lushais and Khasis adopted Christianity by the influence of the missionaries. But this adoption is mainly due to the refined sermons of Christianity. Literature, cleanliness and the way out of easy life generally attracted the simple tribal people. The practice of sacrifice of human beings or animals in the name of religion is common not only among the tribal people but also this was prevalent in other religions. The practice of "Tantricism" and 'Worship of trees' were practised in others as well. In the past 'Tantricism' was all powerful in India and people were lured and immersed in meditation for its realization. Then for evil incidents and diseases, spirits and witches were worshipped by sacrificing the blood of human beings and animals. Though it is the belief that the world is governed by the unseen but all powerful Almighty, still there is the influence of the spirits and ghosts on the human life. Therefore they feel that to satisfy the ghosts and spirits in order to prevent them from exerting their evil influence over man, they worship them by killing various animals as sacrifices and this is the part of their religion. The Hindus also believe in the supreme soul as well as in the existence of spirits and ghosts. The Christians too believe in ghosts and spirits. If something is wrong—somebody is sick, there are all sorts of talks about the influence of 'Rahu' or 'Ketu' or the planet 'Saturn' and also about the ghosts and spirits.

In these days of science these thoughts seem to appear as folk-tales. In the scientific age we do not like to give reliance in the existence of ghosts or spirits and the supreme soul. After death the body will be consumed and the living soul would integrate into the atmosphere of earth. This is what we want to believe. But the simple illiterate tribal people cannot take to that trend of thoughts all on a sudden. The ancient ideas are still there untouched by the waves of science. That is why the worship of trees and 'Tantricism' are still prevalent there. Moreover, most of the tribals worship the sun and the moon. It is their belief, that the sun and the moon are the most powerful of all gods. According to the Abors, the Sun and the Moon are the light-givers to the sky and the earth and lead the path of truth to mankind. Thus "Donni-Pollo"—that is the Sun and the Moon are the supreme beings. Similarly, the people living in the Sipoi Valley worship these two gods—not

only as the indicator of 'Truth' and 'Religion' but also as the most powerful gods ruling mankind. In their esteem the Sun God is the oldest and worship of the Sun God is prevalent from the Siang to upper Kamlong. The Kanyak and the Wanchos of the Tuensang Division worship these two gods. Sometimes there is fighting between the earth god 'Sun' and heavenly 'Moon' and this results in earthquakes. In some tribal societies the influence of Buddhism is marked. The Khamtis and Singhpos of Lohit Valley follow Buddhism. Most of the people of Kameng Division are also Buddhist. They still worship the image of Buddha—"Sungha-Changyat". The basis of this religion is to show respect, love and pity to the living beings. Of the Nagas the Aos, Semas, Angamis, Lothas are mostly Christians.

It is possible, that tribal life is not rich in dances and songs and there may not be any touch of new modification. It is natural to see the tribal life lacking in modern musical instruments. Their dances and songs are associated with indigenous nationalistic mind. The influences of Cinema is well marked in our songs and dances and we get delight out of it. We derive little pleasure to look into the past, rich with folk dances and songs. But here in the frontier—the touch of ultra-modern dances and songs are not felt as yet. Therefore the past is still living here with the simple and easy tuneful songs with rather unskilled dances. Most of the dances of this Frontier people depict a picture of war and heroism. The Sherduppens and the Monpas dance with ferocious masks on their faces. The dances of the Chang, Phom, Yanchu, Konyak have got such similarities. The main implements of dances are spears, swords, shields, bows and arrows. The inhabitants of the Subansiri Division are not so expert in dancing. The Tagins, Abors, Hill Miris too dance with symphony. The dances of Dafflas do not resemble those of others. The Apatanis lack in symphony in their dances. The Mishmis and Manpas possess small drums and brass-plates. The Mishmis particularly own an instrument like Sitar making "ting-tang" sounds. The festival dance of Mishmis are fairly attractive. The Nagas play long drums in war dances. Flute is more or less unknown among the frontier people. The dances of the Miris living in N.E.F.A. resemble the Assamese Bihu—dances with drums and

flutes made of Buffalo-horns. The tune and idea of the song are based on romanticism coming out of a free and jubilant mind with the desire for love. The songs sung by the boys of Kanyak and the Yanchos are melodious. Subansiri is poor in songs. People of the Siang on the other hand have got lively songs. The Songs of the Sherdukpens are rather unattractive as they are more or less tuneless.

BEHIND THE INNER LINE

Padma Barkataki

The political unkind line that divides the North-Eastern hills of Assam from the plains, is known as the *Inner Line* in administrative language since the former's administration was taken over by the Central Government in the early post independence period. This dismemberment was considered necessary primarily for the advantage of the administrative machinery and, apparently, not for the betterment of the people of the area.

THE INNER LINE

This Inner Line has got a history that no true Indian can be proud of. The term "Inner Line" is borrowed from the Inner Line Regulations of 1873 under which provisions were made, for the first time in history by the British rulers, to isolate the hills from the plains of Assam. Then, the Frontier Tract Regulations were another attempt at completing total isolationism. The Government of India Act of 1919 defined these hills as *de-facto* and *de-jure* tribal areas. And thus these Indian highlanders were interned in their respective hills for about a hundred years.

Beyond this Inner Line spreads a region of green hills gradually descending from the Tibetan plateau of the lofty Himalayas to the lovely plains of Assam. This horse-shoe-shaped mountainous *muniment* of Assam guards India's north-eastern frontier breasting the Republics of China and Burma. Extending over an area of about 35,000 sq. miles with a scanty population of hardly 20 per sq. mile (or about nine lakhs in all), these hills are the abode of some Assamese highlanders known as the Akas, the Daflas, the Abors, the Miris, the Mishmis, the Nagas etc. Each of these tribes, again, has more than one clan. Each hill is known by the inhabiting tribe.

THE FIRST SETTLERS

History is silent about the time when these people first occupied their respective hills. It seems, since very early days, Assam attracted wandering human families. It is said that centuries before the beginning of the Christian Era, the Austric people penetrated into Assam. From the names of places and rivers given by them, it can be said that influence of these people extended all over Assam. But now they occupy only the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Austric people left their imprint on Assamese culture, language and tradition. Probably a next wave of people came. The Austrics, after a fight with the invaders, who apparently were stronger, left the whole of Assam and climbed up the Khasi and Jaintia Hills to live there. Similarly, several waves of people came. Probably the defeated people withdrew to the hills yielding the plains for the stronger races. During that period the plains area of Assam was a battle-field for the invading and inhabiting races. There must have been frequent battles to establish supremacy of this race or the other. So the defeated tribes absconded to the hills either to live a peaceful life or to reorganize their strength for a subsequent battle.

Floods of the turbulent rivers of Assam might be another cause which compelled these people to ascend these hills leaving behind the plains. There must have been more damaging floods than now. We find in the Kalika Purnana, that once the floods of the Brahmaputra inundated the plains and wiped away thousands of *Siva-Lingams*, and thus assimilated all the sacred places. The story of Parasurama of the Mahabharata, who made the Brahmaputra flow through Assam, is another hint to suppose that there must have been another devastating flood at that time. The fact that all religious places are situated either on hillocks or on hills is enough to judge that people were afraid of floods. So, at least some of the Assamese people went to the hills to avoid frequent floods and them we know now as the Abors, the Khasis, the Nagas etc.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Assam is a true example of India's great ideal—unity in diversity. Every race or tribe or wandering family of man that came to Assam got assimilated and absorbed into the mighty

Assamese nation just as the numerous tributaries proudly surrender their identity to the mighty Brahmaputra. Every one of them contributed enough towards the racial make-up of the Assamese people. They together built up the culture, tradition and a rich language. So strong and united was this Assamese nation that none of the Indian Emperors, not to speak of the foreign rulers, could conquer and annex Assam. The Muslims failed to invade Assam. So strong has been the language and culture of Assam that the Ahoms, coming from the East in the 13th century, had to adopt the Assamese language and embrace Assam's religion and culture. Any foreigner in Assam will be surprised when to his queries every second man will give a different name of his tribe, clan or class—Miris, Garos, Chutias, Ahoms, Chaodangs, and what not. But let the foreigner ask them 'who are the Assamese?' All of them will reply confidently "Of course, we are." This pride of claiming himself as Assamese, whether he lives in the hills or in the plains jealously guards the homogeneity of Assam.

But, though isolated by the British rulers and now dismembered for administrative reasons, these hills were, never in the history before, dissociated from the rest of Assam. Unlike the 20th century history, people living in these hills were never considered as "uncivilised" and "hostile." In mythologies like the Mahabharata, these hills were within a kingdom over which Bhagadatta and his successors ruled. King Bana of the Mahabharata, King Naraka of about 400 A.D. and King Arimatta had different parts of these hills within their territories. Religious history claims that "there was an Aryan settlement at a distance of 15 days march through hilly roads from the Ahom territory beyond the regions occupied by the Abors and the Miris." This means that there were regular throughfares through these hills. In the Yogini-Tantra, an ancient book on religion in Assam, there is mention of a Kolva-Pitha in the north-eastern region of Assam "where moral and secular laws framed by tribes men themselves were followed." Yogini-Tantra gives the northern boundary of Soumara Pitha (a name given to northern Assam) as the Manasa lake, the origin of the river Brahmaputra in the Himalayas. There is still another reference of a Kalita Kingdom extending over this region from the very beginning of the 16th century—upto the middle of the eighteenth century.

Of late, a few historical evidences have been collected in the Daffa Hills and beyond Sadiya to substantiate the existence of a civilization in this region which are identical with contemporary evidences collected in the plains of Assam. The noted scholar, Dr. Kakati, quotes a devastating flood during the reign of the Ahom Kings, which washed down a civilized people. As this river serpentine its course through the Mishmi hills and the Abor hills, it is evident that these people were not "uncivilized" as we call them now.

The Ahoms (from the 13th to the 18th century) had cordial relations with these people. In all the hills, the Ahom had their Katakis or representatives. Their modes of living were honoured and protected by the Ahom Kings.

THE McMOHAN LINE

During the period from 1826 to 1910 A.D. no attention was paid to explore these almost inaccessible mountainous regions and thus they were left to themselves debarred from any intercourse with the advancing civilization of the world. The British first paid some attention towards these hills when suddenly in 1910 the Chinese Government claiming suzerainty over Tibet demanded the wide area comprising these hills within their proposed territory. In 1914, Sir Henry McMahon negotiated to hold a conference between India, China and Tibet to define the hitherto undefined Indo-Chinese boundary along the Himalayan snow-clad range. This conference fixed a boundary line known as "the McMahon Line" which still serves as the common frontier line between China and India. After this, an officer of senior cadre of the India Government, treading through these untrodden hills at great personal risk, established a few semi-military outposts. Since then till the end of the British rule these places were utilized only by anthropologists for their study and experiments.

The British days were over. Very few of these Assamese highlanders knew that they were independent. The Late Gopinath Bardoloi, the first Chief Minister of Assam in independent India, undertook a few strenuous tours to tell these people personally that they were independent. He was greeted everywhere. He spent enough time in planning development of these hitherto neglected areas. Then came the centre's decision to separate these areas from Assam for administrative reasons.

This decision has considerably told upon the cultural and traditional homogeneity of the people of Assam. Though there is an understanding to unite these hills with the rest of Assam as soon as the desired uplift works are complete, the present trends are far from being hopeful.

NAGA HOSTILITY

Somebody may ask blindly why the Nagas are hostile if they belong to one homogeneous Assam? Of course this is a pertinent question when asked by those who know very little about Assam. But can anybody say that the Nagas are hostile to the Assamese people? Not to speak of to-day, even centuries before, political absconders like Gadapani from the plains went to the Naga Hills to hide and to reorganize his strength. Folk songs and stories of both the hills and the plains have in store enough material to speak of the sweet relation and love between them. Even now, these Nagas say that they dislike the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and, for that, they dislike whoever goes to 'impose' upon them this Schedule. That's how the Assam Government is unpopular with the Nagas. Otherwise, they still now carry on their usual trade and business with the plains, they come down even to-day to the plains of Assam batch by batch in their usual sight-seeing-cum-marketing trips, and the Assamese people in general are not panicky about the Nagas.

While I toured the Naga Hills last year, I asked my host whether there was any danger to my life (at that time the present disturbances were already started). My host, an old man, laughed and replied, "Our guest-friend's safety is our duty. And we don't have anything against you. You are not the Government. Are You?" Again, while in the Abor Hills during first half of the last year, I came across a bright Abor youth of Galong clan. While talking about their present Government, he told me confidently among other things,—“These Migams (meaning the officers of the N.E.F.A. stationed there) want us to learn *Indi* (meaning Hindi). We know our Assamese and it is easy to learn. We do not know how many languages they want us to learn. At Along, the headquarters of the Abor Hills, I saw some Abor interpreters of the N.E.F.A. Administration who deciphered the Abor dialect into Assamese and then some subordinate Assamese official had to translate them into English, or Hindi

to make the higher official understand them. Such forced introduction of a language which is quite stranger to them, has become the order of the day, I was told, in the whole of N.E.F.A. My friend, the Abor youth, told me on the day of my departure, "I can at least talk with you. You understand what I say. But these Migams don't."

These are only but a few instances to say that these Assamese people living in the hills are not hostile to the people living in the plain of Assam. And how they can be? Their origin is the same, they speak the same language with slight variations from place to place, their culture and traditions are also the same and they have strong affinity in customs and habits.

HISTORY YELLS : THE HILLS AND THE PLAINS OF ASSAM ARE BUT ONE

Prafulla Bezbaruah

The Hills and the plains problem of Assam emerges as one of the most important problems of to-day. It is rather the peculiar problem of this Eastern most State, which is already confronted by one and a hundred other delicate problems. A question naturally arises. Is it a fact that the tribal people do not have any faith upon us since time immemorial? Let us turn to the pages of the past history of Assam. The history of the pre-British era rings out proudly from the hallowed vestry of the temple of our glory : "We have been keeping our affectionate tie with you on the basis of the true vow-friendship and amity to which we are pledged from the earliest times. It is certain that our mutual affection for each other would not diminish even if the sun rises in the West and not in the usual East" (The letter written by Parbatia Jayantia Raja to Swargadew Rudra Singha). It indeed is a matter of regret that such a tie of unity and friendship between the hills and the plains people should have been gnawed away by the canker of time. There was a time when one could claim the splendour and glory of the Brindaban of the Epics. 'The embodiment, oh thou wert of love and affection, and thou art gone forever. Meanwhile, several pages of history have been written. Nevertheless, it is true, that strain of blood floats when washed, but flesh does not.' Although our cordial relationship with the tribal people has underwent a change due to the pressure of the policies of the alien rulers, there still remains the urge of relationship of this 'flesh and blood'. That is why the two peoples—one from the blue hills and the other from the green plains address each other as "Mita" (friend) whenever they meet.

The first crack that, shook the temple of unity of the hills and plains was caused by the Britishers. At the time of the Ahom Raja, the tribal peoples such as the Nagas, the Daflas, the Abors, the Mishimis, the Singphows, the Khamtis, the Bhutias, the Garos, the Miris, the Naras, the Mikirs, the Lalungs, the Duraiyas, the Fakials, etc., living in the vicinity of Assam led their respective lives in complete peace and harmony with the subjects of the Ahom Rajas. Whenever Assam was in danger they all buzzed with excitement like the hornets. The Assamese of that time were a people very difficult to be conquered and humiliated. The Swargadew himself was, a veritable, 'Indra' the King of Gods. In the Persian Book, 'Alam-girnama' the author, while giving a description of the Assamese people observed thus : "They (the Assamese) do not want to be under anyone's rule or orders ; they do whatever they like. Their language has got no similarity whatever with that of the people of Bengal. From the very linements of their faces one can gauge the strength and valour they possess."

The bond of friendship between the hills and the plains dates back to the days of Sukapha. After having conquered Assam, Sukapha sent a message to the king of the Barahi Morans—"Let us face each other. Let them come. We have come from the upper region. They are the original inhabitants of this land we are guests after all. You ought to make us familiar with the village." When the Kachari King surrendered to Suhunmung Dehingia Raja the latter presented him with his own golden ring, the Royal Elephant, Plykon, the golden sword and a royal horse. After awarding these presents he explained to the Kachari King Neosoong and his brother this way, "You come of a mighty Royal family. You must not let yourselves to be melt away like the lead, Setu (a kind of metal) and the tin. You must not also be cruel in mind." The Kachari King also held those sacred words with due serenity. During the region of Swargadew Rudra Singh, the Kachari King Tamradhwaja said, "By Jove, I promise that the gourd may sink down, the stone may float, the crow become white and the stork black ; the mighty Brahmaputra may flow backward ; even then shall I not go back upon my word". The Jayantia King was also a descendant of our family. History clearly shows us that Swargadeu Pratapsingha had taken the daughter of King

Jashamanik as wife in 1606. During the reign of Jayadhwaj-Singha when the Mughals invaded Assam, the Jayantia King being unable to assist the Assam Raja with soldiers regretfully said, "Oh, what a pity. We did not hear about the Mughals ransacking your Excellency's country. Your Excellency did not even inform us about the same. Being unable to extend our helping hand at that hour of crisis we are so sorely grieved and feel as if they invaded our country and not yours! The Mughals had plundered your country and we here sat tight and, as we did not issue orders thousands of soldiers could not go to your assistance. That is what we are sorry for. Gargaon and Jayantia are but one." Now, at the time of revival of our country we remember with humility. "Gargaon and Jayantia are but one and it behoves you now know that"! The description of the cordial relationship that we had with the Nagas can be found at the time of Gadadhar Singha. Because, during his time the Swargadew sent Tancheng Phukan to arrest Nagas on the offence of killing a few of our men. Afterwards, a fight took place at Dayang. He made a search for the Nagas for two days but could not get hold of the offenders. At last the Nagas themselves met him and said—"We are all humble servants of the Swargadew. We swear we did not do this. The Abors had done this. Still as we consider it a fault on our part we will give the Swargadew two queens with attendants. Having heard this, Phukan took all Nagas, and presented them before the Swargadew, who understanding what had really happened gladly released them with gifts and presents. It is true that Srimanta Sankardev is no more in this world. Nevertheless, he had left behind us an Assam by uniting the peoples of the hills and the plains with the thread of culture that has withstood all the ravages for long five hundred years. He could build the great edifice of Assamese culture by sending Narottam of the Nagas, Paramananda of the Miris, Ramai of the Kacharies Purnananda of the Kaivartas, Haridas of the Baniyas, Chandsai of the Muslims, Damodar of the Bhutias, as Ambassadors of Unity to the nook and corner of the hills. That is why the foreigners, not being able to subdue the people of Assam by power, took to winning them over by overtures of treaties. But it failed in the very first attempt. Because the Assamese knew well—"Foreigners destroy the land. It is for this reason that the people of Assam

right from the 'Dupdar' (Council Chamber of the Viceroy of the Assamese King at Gauhati) down to the Royal Palace in Upper Assam became alert and vigilant the moment a single foreigner set his feet on the border of Assam. During the reign of Swargadew Swarga Narayan, Ratansha, a merchant from Bengal coming to trade in Assam, purchased Agar timber at Singari of Majgaon (Now a village on the bank of the Ferryghat at North Gauhati.) When Haboob Chetia came to know of this he seized the timbers and ordered that the merchant be driven out of Assam. He also told him, "You feel encouraged after killing the Koch King. Now you conspire to kill us. If I happen to find you again in this land I shall be the last person to spare you." Moreover, when the Ahom King came to learn about it, he flew into a rage "Once the foreigner starts trading here in my Majgaon, what is left for us." The moment these words slipped out of his lips, all the people were stirred up with excitement, chased him and held the merchant up on the way. Not even a vestige of merchandise was spared. They advanced towards the North, and after having seen two merchants busy in purchasing pulse, mustard and tabacco with two flat boats in a place called Belsiri, two Saangdharas (a certain Class of people under the Ahom King) approached them and killed them. This was the attitude of the Assamese towards the foreigners. These Europeans coming to Assam from beyond the seas have polluted the glory of our sacred country. A certain European, happened to pay a visit to Assam during the reign of Swargadew Pratap Singha. But he could not escape from the vigilant eyes of the Assamese guards and watchmen. The European arrived at Sualkushi and fired at a vulture from there. Our people having heard the sound of the firing of gun chased and caught hold of him. Afterwards he was sent to the King. News also was sent to the king informing that some boats of foreigners ran aground in the Hajo stream. The Swargadew, it was learnt, sent this unruly European back by the very way he entered Assam. Now basking in the glaring rays of independence, we remember in vain the pristine glory of ours. It is really a matter of deep regret that the same Assamese people who once could bind the knot of unity between the hills and plains have now become unable to do the same. Have the Assamese become really incapable of strengthening the bond of good will and friendship between the tribal brethren

of the NEFA and Assam? How it is that people from elsewhere know the *modus operandi* of establishing this relationship across us? It sounds really fantastic. For there is a saying in Assamese—"How Lord! The Foreigners become relatives!

The silk cotton tree is not the Sandal." This is exactly what we find at every sphere of our life and activities.

It is already well known to us what could be the ulterior motive of the foreigners, who, during by-gone days of Assam's independence could not even set his feet on the soil in their attempt to give that golden fruit. Yes, the land of Assam is still in existence but not with her old kings to beautify the throne. Srimanta Sankardev, thou art gone and gone forever! Who then will build the great edifice of a compact culture of the hills and plains to-day!

When the Scion of the Jadus died

Mathura's fame waned

When the monarch of the Raghus died

the progress of the country was greatly

retarded.

A great responsibility has therefore devolved upon the youths of Assam to-day. It is high time that the youth of the country rise to the occasion with vigour and vision. That is why at this auspicious hour of our country's renaissance we should go forward to build a new Assam, remembering at every step the pristine glory that is enshrined in history. The reeds die no doubt but it is equally true that it sprouts again. History still now rings out to us.

The relation of friendship and amity between you and us is not new, it has been continuing from the remote past and will continue to be so for ever.

* Translated from Assamese by Hassan Md. Wazir Ali.

ANTI-ASSAMESE ACTIVITIES IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE SET-UP OF NEFA

*(A Front Page News Item in the Daily Natun Asamiya,
Gauhati, May 15, 1954)*

The Anti-Assamese propaganda and activities in the administrative set-up of the North-East Frontier Agency, have been geared up at an alarming rate.

Following the recent convention of high Government officials held in the name of sound and effective administration, the newly appointed Political Officers, Assistant Political Officers and such other officers of the same cadre have indulged in anti-Assamese propaganda openly.

The following few examples will clearly show how these anti-Assamese activities carried on by the said officials have spread widely into different spheres in different ways.

A scheme to set up a Treasury in the Abor Hills is under consideration. For this a few new clerks will be required and advertisement has already been given in the local newspapers to that effect. In addition to the applications received from candidates already with employment, many more applications from candidates hailing from different parts of Assam also came. It is indeed a sad commentary on the part of the newly appointed officials who are at the helm of affairs in so far as the administration of NEFA is concerned, that they have to advertise afresh for the said posts in the newspapers of such places outside Assam as the U.P., Delhi etc., on the plea that they did not find any eligible candidate among the Assamese applicants. The high officials of the administration after having secured their position on the area have deprived the children of the soil of the said ordinary posts.

SMELL OF ASSAMESE IMPERIALISM

It is really a matter of grave concern as to how the new Political and Assistant Political Officers have sensed the smell

of Assamese imperialism in the old social structure of the tribal people!

The Galong women living in the Frontier areas always wear Mekhela just after the manner their Assamese counterparts do in the plains. While doing odd household jobs they put on Mekhela made of cotton. They treasure with meticulous care the "Muga Mekhela" either as property or dresses to be worn on special purposes and occasions. The "Endi Chaddar" too is a very precious thing for the Galongs. In their marriages even the "Endi Chaddar" forms a very significant part of dowry to be given with cow and glass beads.

The Galong women have long lock of hair and they dress it more or less in the same manner with the Assamese women. Moreover, many social similarities of the Galongs with the plains people have remained unchanged through the ages, on account of the close contact established between them through Dibrugarh as far back as the days of the Ahom kings. But now it is surprising, nay, astonishing that the newly arrived Political and Assistant Political Officers have seen the hoapy-headed monster of 'provincialism' here. For the first time while out on tour they had put questions to the girls as to why they did trim their hair short and why they had taken to wearing of Mekhelas of the Assamese people giving up dresses of their own. In reply to such questions they simply laugh and dismiss the same as something futile and unnecessary.

It has been observed that these officials apprehend a sort of danger when they see the people of the Galong Area speaking chaste Assamese.

Finding that not even a single student has ever raised a voice of protest against learning or studying of Assamese language the first question they usually ask the students when on visit to their schools is whether they are taught Hindi, and if not, why not.

Besides the P.O.'s and A.P.O.'s what concerns us most is the oppressive action on the part of a distinguished Bengali Officer. It is noteworthy how this officer has been discharging his administrative functions at Pasighat and in neighbouring villages for the last two months.

After having inspected the Pasighat High School he is very much dissatisfied, because, the students there have not been

taught in their mother tongue, but instead, they have been taught in Assamese. It is verily a lame excuse to say that there are no books written in the Abor language (dialects). In the Pasighat High School the students are taught in the art of cane and bamboo work. Seeing all these products namely, the chair, the table etc., he opines that there is no use imparting to the students instruction in making such things as have no relation whatever, with the real life of the tribal people. Again, most surprisingly enough, the same officer while on a visit to the Weaving School, happened to see a few improved designs and as such he issued orders to close this work in designs forthwith.

In addition to this, a few of his reactionary and anti-Assamese activities will certainly draw the attention of all. Once, he had been to a village called "Ayeng". There the "Ponoo" (a kind of tribal festival) was being observed amidst scenes of due solemnity and enthusiasm by the village folk. The "Ponoo" was going on when all the boys there approached their teacher (present) and requested him to sing a Bihunam. When they were told by the teacher in reply that he knew only to dance, then the boys ventured to sing Bihunam themselves. (As it is a village located near Pasighat most of the Abor boys know what Bihunam is and they can sing them as well) and the master danced to the particular tune of the Nam. What is more, the boys could not also resist the temptation of dancing with their master. They joined him. This friendship and love between the teacher and the taught have at once made the Bengalee Officer feel very unhappy, jealous and impatient and he demanded an explanation this way:—

"Why do you teach them these Assamese songs and dances?" The master replied—"Sir, I for one have not taught them these songs for, you have seen that they are already acquainted with these things." For this reason the master was ill-treated by the said Officer and this incident somehow reached the ears of the Gams, (i.e. the Gaonburahs). They all went to the Officer and expressed their protest before him for the treatment meted out to the teacher. But whether this expression of regret has borne any fruit has not yet been known.

Also, he went to a village 'Meb' by name and seeing there an Assamese Gram-Sevak in dhuti he objected.

SIGN OF FALSE FRIENDSHIP

These high officials who have vested interests in the tribal people of the Frontier Area have already spread the malicious news inside and outside Assam that the behaviour and treatment of the Assamese Officers are quite against the wishes of the tribal people. They have published that only the non-Assamese Officers can feel the pulse of the tribal people and can work sincerely for the betterment of their existing condition for being able to work with them in perfect friendship and harmony. A single instance would suffice to show the real spirit of the non-Assamese Officers of very high order deputed by the Centre to serve in these tribal areas.

Towards the latter part of the last week the said Bengalee Officer accompanied by some officers of Community Project went to a village called "Balek" to see "Ponoo". When the rush of audience became gradually heavy the bench on which the officers were seated had to be taken a few steps backward, and in doing so, by an Abor Gram Sevak one of the legs of the bench suddenly struck against the tip of the said Officer's shoe. The Officer felt badly insulted and as such he ill-treated the Gram Sevak inspite of his repeated requests to be kindly excused for what had happened. The haughtiness on the part of the Officer naturally made the youths feel angry and agitated. The old men of the village present on the occasion, however, managed to bring the situation under control. The next day, the Gram Sevak went to the Pasighat Dak Bungalow and requested the Officer to pardon him for having given him (Officer) unnecessary trouble. But he had to come back being insulted in return. The particular Gram Sevak was an educated Abor young man. It is to be noted that no such ill-treatment has ever been received by the tribal people in the hands of the Assamese officers no matter whether he be a high officer or an ordinary one.

In this connection the name of another Central Govt. employee who added venom to these anti-Assamese activities of the officers in the Frontier Agency also needs mentioned. Recently, a high Officer of the All India Radio, Gauhati, while going to Pasighat also paid visits to places like "Balek", "Nedam" Etc., in the Frontier Area. He went to see the Weaving School at Pasighat and there seeing the Galong girl trainees in Mekhela-

Chaddar he asked,—being most surprised, “Why have they been allowed to take to the wearing of Mekhela-Chaddar by giving up their own dress?” When told that it was the old dress of the Galong girls, he poised protest at first but fortunately for the girls he had been silenced by the Assamese officer who was with him by clearly pointing out to his own English dress.

Such are the activities as are there at work in the North-East Frontier Agency behind the screen of so-called Civilised World.

* Reproduced by courtesy. Translated from the original by Hassan Mohammed Wazir Ali, Sibsagar College.

APPENDICES

"NO DESIRE TO OUST ASSAMESE"

N.E.F.A. Communique

"There is no desire to 'oust' Assamese language from the North-East Frontier Agency which continues for the time being as a medium of instruction and will, in addition, be taught as an optional subject in years to come",—an official of the N.E.F.A. administration explained here to-day.

It should be mentioned here that Assam to-day under the auspices of Asom Sahitya Sabha observed "Assamese Language in N.E.F.A. Day" when public meetings adopted resolutions demanding restoration of the Assamese language to the position of medium of instructions in the N.E.F.A. region.

It has been officially explained by the N.E.F.A. administration that the policy of the Government of India is that the medium of instruction in all schools in the N.E.F.A. upto primary stage and even in higher classes to the extent possible, should be the mother tongue of the pupils and that script should be Devnagri. Roman script has, however, been retained in the Tuensang Frontier Division.

This decision was arrived at after due and careful consideration of the whole problem by a commission of the Central Education Ministry consisting of Sri Aryyanayakam of Hindustani Talimi Sangh and Jonab K. G. Saiyidain, at present Secretary to the Education Ministry, which was appointed specially to go into the question of script and language for the Agency areas.

HINDI MEDIUM

It was also decided that after primary stage, the medium of instruction should be Hindi till text books and other literature become available in the mother tongue of the pupils.

This policy of the Government is still in process of implementation and until text books are ready, the medium of instruction in most schools continues to be Assamese. Nor there is any intention of the administration to switch over from the existing medium of instruction to Hindi in an abrupt manner, particularly in case of students who might thus suffer a setback in their education.

A choice between Hindi and Assamese had to be made because to would be unreasonable to expect tribal people of the N.E.F.A. in their present state of development to learn more than two languages, namely their own and either Hindi or Assamese. The preference has been given to the former which is the language of India.*

THE REMOVAL OF THE BASIC TRAINING INSTITUTE FROM MARGHERITA

The administrative machinery of the N.E.F.A. has of late, become very much alert to prevent strikes and demonstrations held here from time to time in connection with the repeatedly strong demands of the tribal students of the area for the introduction of Assamese in the schools as the medium of instruction and the abolition of Hindi from the lower classes. It has taken every possible measure to see that no news of it spreads in the plains and that the students of the N.E.F.A. are prevented from coming in contact with the students of the plains.

This Basic Training Institute was first established at Sadiya. But after the devastating earthquake that took place in the year 1950, this Institute was shifted to Margherita. Now, in the middle of this month, the Institute has again been removed to Saa'-nglang Sub-Division, a place situated at a distance of 26 miles from Margharita of the Tirap Frontier Division in N.E.F.A. Instructions have also been issued simultaneously to the effect that all the trainees, the trainers and other assistants of the Institute move from Margherita. The Demonstration School here will also be abolished in the first week of October next. The students of this Institute having facilities of training up-to class VII in English standard have been directed to get themselves

* The communique appeared in the *Assam Tribune*, June 10, 1956.

admitted into different schools. The students of classes VI and VII and the students of classes IV and V are being directed to be admitted into the Pasighat High School in the Abor Hills and in the schools situated at Saa'-nglang respectively.

As for the admission of the students reading in the class VII and other lower classes and hailing from Tirap Frontier Division, they have been asked to get themselves admitted into schools lying near about their own villages. It is learnt that these tribal trainees have expressed dissatisfaction and resentment at this whimsical policy adopted by the administration concerned on account of the fact that they have been living in close contact with the people in the plains and sharing by the common benefit of being able to know about the progress, prosperity and development of the world outside their own. The trainees also believe that the policy of the Administration to shift the "New Colony" from Margherita upon which lakhs of rupees have already been spent to a distant unhealthy not easily accessible and sequestered hilly place like Saa'-nglang, smacks of a rather ulterior motive on the part of the Government to oppress the tribal students. Again this shifting will entail a huge amount of expenditure.*

A LETTER FROM AN ADI YOUTH

Somewhere in N.E.F.A.
27th November, 1956.

Revered Sir,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of the notices sent to me the other day by you. Frankly, it was indeed very good to receive these notices and all were delighted for the same. Taking time by the forelock, I myself have distributed some of these notices and also read out the same to the people. They have expressed their satisfaction and enthusiasm after having heard the contents of the same. By the way let me tell you that I have informed you about what follows immediately rather in secret manner, for as you know perhaps, that such matters have got to be kept under lock and key in our place, and if somehow it

* A News item in the Janambhoomi, Jorhat, Dated Nov. 21, 1957.
Reproduced by courtesy.

finds wings in the air, our position will veritably be at stake. However this I must tell you that every one here adores Assamese as his own mother tongue. They firmly believe that the Assamese language can never be snatched away from the tribal brethren till the very entity of Assam itself wanes out of existence.

Lastly, I convey our sincere desire to you that we must not be deprived of the plains peoples' wisdom and advice. It is all the same, therefore, to say that your untiring and ceaseless efforts are our own efforts. But on the other hand this is not, however, to say that we are going to remain the same ordinary unsophisticated tribal folks for all time to come. The Students Association is trying its level best and would also continue to do so. Assamese language is still the medium of instruction in Pasighat school.

I shall be only too glad if you would kindly let me know the name of the President of the all Assam students Association. I am really very keen to meet him personally, but unfortunately, inspite of my best efforts, I have not yet been able to find him out.

With best regards to your goodself and to your colleagues as well.

I remain,
Yours most obediently,
.....Ru.....

ASSAMESE IN N.E.F.A.*

An official spokesman of the N.E.F.A. administration has made a statement to the Press on the place of the Assamese language in the N.E.F.A. which, read between the lines, yields conclusions very different from those claimed by the spokesman. It has been contended that the administration has no desire to "oust" Assamese from the Agency. Assamese was to continue for the time being, the statement claimed, as the medium of instruction and was in future to be taught as optional subject. What followed simply went to destroy any illusion that might have been created by these initial assertions. For it was soon

* Editorial of the *Daily Assam Tribune*, June 12, 1956. Reproduced by kind permission.

revealed that on the plea of sparing the tribals the burden of learning more than two languages Hindi was to be used in preference to Assamese as a medium of instruction in consideration of its position as the national language of India. We do not belittle the importance of Hindi. All the same we are vehemently opposed to the policy of foisting Hindi on a people in a sort of proselytizing zeal to wipe out local linguistic ties that are the products of age-long historical and cultural association. We refer to the position of the Assamese language in the N.E.F.A. For ages past as a result of many-sided contact, Assamese has been enjoying the position of a *lingua franca* among the tribals of the region. Assamese is recognized in the Constitution itself as one of the major languages of the Union.

Against these facts, if there is any language that has a claim to be compulsorily taught in the Agency area alongside the local dialect, it is clearly Assamese. If Hindi's position as the national language of the Union needs recognition secured by making Hindi it can be an optional subject for study as in the schools of the plains districts. Reversal of this position would only mean the N.E.F.A. administration is bent on driving the tribals further apart from their brethren in the plains by superimposing cultural segregation on political segregation. Dissatisfaction is already seething among the frontier tribesmen over the language policy in the Agency. Thanks to the iron curtain maintained by the administration, the world outside knows but little of it. The few who had the good fortune to be let in and acquainted with the facts at first hand returned impressed with the superiority of the connection, we recall the views expressed by Mr. Justice Deka in an article in this paper. Those weighty observations, coming as they did from a man of his eminence, merit the close study of those who are shaping the language policy in the N.E.F.A.

We have no objection to the switch-over from the Roman to the Devnagri script in certain areas of the frontier. We have no objection as well to the teaching of Hindi in schools in the region. What we do not and will never countenance is the supplanting of Assamese by Hindi in the proposed arbitrary fashion. The State Government owes it to the public to place its own views on this burning issue. In particular, it must let the public know forthwith the submissions it made before the

Official Language Commission in regard to the N.E.F.A. tribesmen. Let us be assured the State Government has not itself swallowed the language policy of the N.E.F.A. administration.

**EXTRACT FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE OPEN
CONFERENCE OF THE ASSAM SAHITYA SABHA**

held at Dhubri on December 27 & 28 '56.

RESOLUTION No. VIII.

With a view to affording proper facilities for the educational and cultural development of the children of the tribal population of N.E.F.A., the Silver Jubilee Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha requests the Government of Assam to take effective steps for the establishment of hostels for tribal students at Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Gauhati and other places in the plains and for the grant of suitable scholarships, stipends or grants to at least 50 tribal students of N.E.F.A. annually to enable them to receive education from the primary to the higher standards.

This meeting is emphatically of opinion that the implementation of this resolution will go a great way towards fostering cordial relations between the people of the hills and plains besides serving as a great incentive to our tribal brothers and sisters.

Adopted unanimously.

Sd/- B. Sharma,
*President.**

LETTER FROM A NAGA YOUNGMAN

Dear Srijut Chaliha,

Kindly accept at the outset my sincere "Namaskar". I am very glad to receive your letter. I have not at all liked this Kohima-Convention. How sad it is to think of ceceding from Assam! That Convention did not at all represent the masses. From our station of 'Mon', only the Angami A.P.O. went to

* The Resolution was duly sent to the Chief Minister, Education Minister, D.P.I. Assam in January 1957. Action upon the same is still unknown.

the Convention and the rest of the people knew nothing of this Convention. So you may take it for granted that all attempts to integrate are bound to fail. If the Govt., in defiance of people's wishes causes integration into a separate unit—it will lead to chaos and disorder. So I request you to write a letter to Mr. Nehru to point out that he has not thought over the consequences that will follow if separation is imposed without properly ascertaining local opinion.

The fact is that because of our present status, the missionaries have not been able to preach Christianity in a large scale or continue their anti-Assam activities very efficiently. Also that because they cannot, at present, manage to train themselves up in war-tactics in order to fight with the Government move—that is why they hold out assurance (for the time being) not to create disorder, chaos and confusion—provided they be brought under a separate unit and Nehru has placed his belief in such assurances.

So please send an appeal to Mr. Nehru, stating therein that the chaotic state will continue to exist if separation is implemented. In any case separation, on our part, from Assam will not be good.

The following are the Rajas who should be invited in the Congress meeting:—

- (1) The Raja of 'Mon'—Sri Khampa Wingham.
- (2) The Raja of 'Changru'—Sri Toukhan Wingham.
- (3) The Raja of 'Jancha'—Sri Toungam Wingham.
- (4) The Raja of 'Rangkham'—Sri Alo Wingham.

There are many other chiefs. They have not taken the opinion of any one.

The Convention was of the Christians only. We know nothing of this. Please state in your appeal to Mr. Nehru the names of these Rajas and let him know that these Rajas know nothing of this (Kohima-Convention) and kindly send one copy of the appeal to me. Please do this for us very early prior to any decision being taken by the Government.

This is what I want to have of you. Please have my 'Namaskar'.

Yours

.....Wang.....

OBSERVANCE OF SRI SANKAR DEV TITHI BY THE DAFLAS*

The birth anniversary of Sri Sankardev was observed by the Dafla community in the temple of Basudev founded at the confluence of the rivers Rangapjan and Kachikata in the native village of Sri Madhabdev under the Mouza of Kherajghat in North Lakhimpur. On the tenth of 'Bhada'—is the tithi day in the small hours of the morning the Dafla men and women came from a distance of nine to ten miles to join the morning service and after participating in all the four services of the day, departed for their home in the evening. The deep reverence of the Daflas during the time of singing the name of the Lord (Nam-Kirtan) is appreciable. They raised the slogan of the name of Lord Hari while chanting the name, as they sat to participate in the 'Nam-Kirtan'. Everyone present was glad at the sight of their respect for the preceptor and their unshakable belief in religion. It is here that Sri Aghona Chandra Gam—a Dafla—has constructed one 'Manikut Griha' (the abode of the deity) at a considerable cost together with one 'Karapat' and a pavement connecting the Karapat and the holy place. At the foundation ceremony one big 'Bhawna' was performed and many tribals came to witness the function. In this big Bhawna all got together without differentiation and illustrated a sense of brotherhood.

THE 5TH SESSION OF THE ADI-MISSING STUDENTS UNION (Extract from the proceedings)

The fifth session of the Adi-Missing students union was held on the 8th October, 1956, under presidentship of Shri Orin Noyong B. B. Secy. of S.F.D. at Pasighat, N.E.F.A. In the meeting was a huge gathering of more than one thousand people of Adi-Missing students, villagers and some officials of the District.

The following are some of the resolutions passed in the meeting:—

3. Pasight High English school was opened 4/5 years

* A news item of the weekly *Asamiya*, 21 Bhadra, (Sept. 7). 1957.

back ; but the students are not given an opportunity to participate either Upper Assam or Lower Assam High School tournament. At the same time N.C.C. is also desideratum for the betterment of the students of N.E.F.A.

Therefore to-day's meeting requests the Government to give an opportunity to the tribal students to join Upper Assam High school tournament and to open a N.C.C. centre at Pasighat.

4. It is proposed by to-day's meeting that the graduate teachers are not paid according to their academic qualifications for which the few graduate teachers are also disappearing from the school gradually. As a result of this, the progress of the students are not satisfactory and deteriorated.

So, to-day's tries to draw the attention of the Govt. and requests the authority to appoint experienced and competent teachers of the Gauhati University, specially in English and Science subjects.

5. The Tribal students of N.E.F.A. were taught through the medium of Assamese long ago. But the overnight change of medium deteriorated the earnest zeal and enthusiasm of the students.

So, to-day's meeting earnestly request the Govt. not to make any imposition upon the medium and the script but to encourage the students to develop themselves steadily and gradually with the existing medium of teaching.

7. The Adi-Missing (Abor Miri) are separate ; but not different tribes. The history of the past tells us that the language, culture, customs, traditions, mode of life of both the Miri and Abor are the same. So, the Govt. is entreated to extend the same facilities which are given to the Abor students to Miri students too.

8. The Govt. is requested by to-day's meeting that, all tribal trainees should be given suitable job after the completion of particular training.

11. There is no land communication among the sixth district of N.E.F.A. as well as with the rest of India. The international communication knew no bounds and it is needless to describe it. For an example all the necessary things of day to day life are also being brought by means of Air only which hampers the financial condition of inhabitants of N.E.F.A., specially in Siang Frontier Division.

So, the Govt. is requested by to-day's meeting to take up to build the land communication, i.e. between Pasighat and Dibrugarh as early as possible, which brings the light of civilisation to the backward people of N.E.F.A. who are still in the darkness far off from the civilisation.

**EXTRACT FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE OPEN
CONFERENCE OF THE ASSAM SAHITYA SABHA
(Silver Jubilee Session)**

held at Dhubri on December 27 & 28, 1956

RESOLUTION No. 2.

Whereas Assamese language and culture constitutes an integral part of the lives of the tribal people of the N.E.F.A. and Assamese has been the medium of instruction in that region for a long time past. The Assam Sahitya Sabha records its vehement protest against the sudden imposition of Hindi as the medium of instruction in the N.E.F.A.

Regretting that despite strong and persistent public opinion against this super-imposition and despite assurances by the present Governor of Assam that any wrong that has been done in the matter would be rectified. The policy yet remains unchanged this Conference expresses its grave concern at the attitude of the authorities which is calculated to isolate our tribal brethren from the Assamese people and cut at the very root of National Unity and Solidarity.

The Assam Sahitya Sabha, therefore, strongly urges upon the government of India to restore the Assamese language to its former status and pristine glory in the N.E.F.A. by reintroducing Assamese as the medium of instruction.

Adopted Unanimously.

Sd./ Sri Benudhar Sharma.

President, Assam Sahitya Sabha.

* The Resolution was duly sent to the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Government of India and the Governor, Assam etc. etc. in January 1957. The reply received in November last is appended herewith.

No. 40/5/57-pub.-1

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA,
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

To

The General Secretary,
The Assam Sahitya Sabha,
Chandrakanta Handique Bhawan,
Jorhat, Assam.

New Delhi—2, the 22nd Nov., 1957.

SUBJECT:—*Resolution of the Assam Sahitya Sabha—Medium of Education in N.E.F.A.*

Dear Sir,

With reference to your letter No. ASS/646/57 dated 21st September 1957, addressed to the Home Minister on the subject noted above, I am directed to state the general policy of the Government of India regarding education in N.E.F.A. is that at the Primary stage the medium of instruction should be the language of the local people. Where this is not possible Hindi has been introduced. Facilities for teaching Assamese are also available. This policy was also explained in the Lok Sabha on 30th May, 1957, in reply to a question on the subject.

Yours faithfully,

Sd./- Illegible.

Under Secretary to the Govt. of India.

THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN THE N.E.F.A.

The policy with regard to the imparting of education at primary stage in many places of the N.E.F.A. areas through the medium of Hindi or the so-called local language in place of the common Assamese language by abolishing the latter against the wishes of the indigenous people is well known to all. Demands had been made and memoranda submitted both before the administration of the N.E.F.A. and the Central government

by the Assam Sahitya Sabha and the indigenous tribal people as well, strongly urging them to reject this anti-Assamese policy. But it is really sad that they have not been able to see their way to give the demands a 'square deal' uptill now. Even in some cases they are found to have the audacity to deny the fact that they are adopting such an anti-Assamese policy. In response to the demands made in the Dhubri session of the Sabha, the Union Home ministry has after a lapse of ten months, informed the Assam Sahitya Sabha that the former demands of the people of Assam have been recognised.

It is learnt that the Union Home Ministry has informed the authorities of the Assam Sahitya Sabha that (1) the primary education in the N.E.F.A. is being imparted through the medium of local languages, that (2) instruction shall have to be imparted through the medium of Hindi in places where it is not possible to do the same in the local languages, that (3) provision has been made for the students to learn Assamese after they complete the Primary Education Standard, if they so desire. The last statement of the Union Home Ministry is not wholly baseless. Six months back Smti. Lakshmi Menon, Deputy Foreign Minister in the External Affairs Ministry, while replying in the Lok Sabha to the questions Sri Hem Barua, M.P. from Assam struck almost the said note regarding the policy followed for the Primary Education in the areas of the N.E.F.A. When Sri Barua wanted to question again the Centre's justifiability behind this attitude against the Assamese language in defiance of the wishes of the tribal people and introducing either Hindi or the local language instead, the impetuous Prime Minister having intervene, himself replied that nowhere in the Area instruction through the medium of Assamese was being abolished against the will of the local inhabitants and that arrangement had been made in all places of the Area for teaching of Assamese to the tribal students after they completed the Primary Standard. The Member from Assam again took the floor to say that it was not in keeping with the actual state of affairs when the Speaker denied him the privilege for the same and asked the Minister concerned to give reply to the remaining questions. The Home Ministry, we presume, must have referred to this answer in its letter to the Assam Sahitya Sabha. But in this letter no one had tried to conceal the real fact of the situation as the Prime

minister did. The reasonableness of otherwise of the proposals of the Assam Sahitya Sabha in connection with the Centre's policy adopted for the N.E.F.A. deserves to be mentioned here. There it was said—(1) The Assamese language should be retained as the medium of Instruction in the schools where the medium is already Assamese. (2) In those areas where Assamese is not the medium of Instruction the local languages be introduced, and if it is not possible, Assamese be made the medium of Instruction. (3) If the tribal people so desire Assamese be introduced as the medium of Instruction. (4) In those places where the local languages are made the medium of Instruction arrangement be made for the teaching of Assamese as a compulsory second language. No just and impartial person can deny the reasonableness of these proposal of the Sahitya Sabha. But, unfortunately as it appears from the reply to the Sabha, not even a single of these demands has gained favour and sympathy in the hands of the Central Government. The public should know that the statement contained in the Centre's reply that arrangement was being made to teach Assamese also actually referred to the arrangement that was being made for the teaching of Assamese as an additional subject after the Primary Education period. To be more precise, Hindi is being given the place of Assamese which is the common and most useful language of the tribal people. No one can reasonably object to the teaching of Hindi as Rashtrabhasa, but it can never be just if Hindi is foisted upon the people by the abolition of Assamese which is the common and natural lingua-franca of the tribal people. The creation of a second N.E.F.A. is in the offing. We fear if the fate of the Assamese language in this N.E.F.A. i.e. Tuensang Area would be like that of the real N.E.F.A. It is no exaggeration to say that the place of Assamese in the Naga Hills is much more important intimate and indispensable than it is in the N.E.F.A. Even the discussion and deliberation of the Kohima Convention of the representatives of eighteen different Naga tribes for the formation of a separate administrative unit (Naga Hills—Tuensang Area) were conducted in the Assamese language. Because the dialects of these different tribes are not understandable to all. Assamese is their inter-tribal, and common language. In almost all the areas of the Naga Hills District Primary Education has been imparted

through the medium of Assamese and not even a single Naga has objected to it and demanded that the Primary Education be imparted in their own mother tongue. Really, the Nagas have no such language as can be used as the medium of instruction in the schools. But now as the administration of this Area will be placed at the disposal of a central ministry, the new administrators might perhaps invent some new languages and they might hold out a plea that the local people are demanding that either their own language be made the medium of Instruction or Hindi in place of the Assamese language. It is time that both the Government and the leaders of Assam become alert about the same. Perhaps, apprehending the black future of the Assamese language in the Naga Hills to be caused by the new administration, the Editors of the News-papers in their memorandum submitted the other day before the Home minister Pant demanded that the place of Assamese in the Naga Hills be kept intact and the new administration be not antagonistic to the cherished goal of the tribal people.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN N.E.F.A. TRIBAL LEADER'S PROTEST TO CENTRE

New Delhi, June 17.

The Union Ministry of External Affairs has received a number of protest letters from important persons belonging to various tribes of N.E.F.A. against the language policy as explained recently in Parliament in course of answers to certain questions on this subject.

The letters mostly favour Assamese as medium of instruction after elementary education is imparted in the local language. While teaching of Hindi is not ruled out altogether, it is suggested that it should begin after Class IV. The representation also insists upon employment of teachers knowing Assamese and exclusion of others who are not familiar with Assamese.

Satisfaction is expressed with present cultural pattern in which close relations prevail between the tribals and the

* The Editorial of the *Natun Asamiya*, in its issue of Dec., 7, 1957. Reproduced by courtesy.

Assamese. Instruction of Hindi as supplanting medium against is opposed but welcomed for better acquaintance with the rest of India and her people.

CIRCULAR

EXTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE EDUCATION SUB-COMITTEE N. E. F. A.

held on 12th March '56

"While the medium of instruction for classes A and B (grade I and II) will remain the local dialect (the mother tongue of the children). In class I and onward (grade III and onward) it should be supplemented by Hindi where necessary. This is in view of the non-literary character of the tribal dialects and the realisation that there would be occasions for explaining the lessons in a language more adequate than the local dialect, the teacher will do well to take to Hindi. It is only by this way that Hindi should supplement the mother tongue as the medium from class I and onward".

CIRCULAR

TO ALL THE TEACHERS OF S. F. D.

SUBJECT:—*Monthly Progress Report on Hindi and teaching through the medium of Local Dialect.*

I would like to point out that wherever equivalent words in any dialect are not available due to the non-literary character of the dialect, Hindi substitutes should be used. In this connection an extract of the proceedings of the Second meeting of the Education Sub-committee, N.E.F.A. held on 12th Nov., 1956, may be referred to.

The instructions as contained in the enclosed extract should be noted for your future guidance and compliance.

By courtesy of the *Assam Tribune*, June 18, 1957.

CIRCULAR

From—**ASSISTANT EDUCATION OFFICER, S.F.D. ZIRO,**

To—**ALL THE TEACHERS IN-CHARGE OF S.F.D.
AND HEAD MASTERS, ZIRO H. E. SCHOOL.**

SUBJECT: *Hindi periods/classes in schools.*

It is considered necessary to request you to pay sufficient attention on the subject indicated above and to confirm that at least five periods are allotted for each class per week in the School.

Please confirm that the medium of instruction in classes A and B is exclusively tribal dialect with the help of Devnagri Script. Assamese should not be taught in classes A and B.

N.E.F.A.*

Sir,—The Language policy in N.E.F.A. has, of late, aroused considerable feeling all over Assam and even in parts of N.E.F.A. But instead of paying any heed to all this, the N.E.F.A. administration has been following a policy of regular affront to public opinion. Only recently, the Director of Education in N.E.F.A. visited the area and in course of inspection issued orders for immediate introduction of Hindi even in classes A and B of the primary schools. So long these elementary classes were excluded from the provision of imposing Hindi.

The tribal people of N.E.F.A., however, are conversant with Assamese and they have been demanding re-introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction there. The recent memorandum submitted by the tribal people to the Governor is a pointer to their strong feeling in the matter. Naturally, therefore, the people are greatly perturbed by this attitude of the authorities—an attitude that appears to have resulted in gradual decline in the number of students in the schools.

* A letter in the Correspondence Column of *Assam Tribune*, Dated 7th May, 1957.

Another curious thing to note in this connection is the fact that instead of recruiting and retaining qualified Hindi knowing Assamese teachers, the authorities are recruiting under-qualified non-Assamese teachers with comparatively better salaries. Not being conversant with any language other than Hindi these teachers are only creating chaos as the little tribal children cannot make anything out of their coaching.

We, therefore, urge upon the N.E.F.A. administration not to exploit the simplicity of our tribal brethren and flout persistent public opinion in favour of adequate provision of the Assamese language in N.E.F.A.—yours etc.

ONE WHO KNOWS.

PASIGHAT PEOPLE DEMAND ASSAMESE IN HIGH SCHOOL

(From our correspondent)

Jorhat, June, 25.

The people of Pasighat have presented two persistent demands before the Assistant Political Officer at Pasighat.

One of the demands relate to the transfer of Assamese teachers serving in the local high school. It is reported that the tribal people have asked the authorities to retain the Assamese teachers, who are now under order of transfer to interior schools following the agitation in the plains districts for reintroduction of Assamese in N.E.F.A.

It is reported that in view of the N.E.F.A. Administration's decision to introduce Hindi as the medium of instruction, the Assamese teachers are being transferred to interior schools, their posts in the local schools being filled up by teachers appointed from outside.

Another demand is in favour of the introduction of Assamese in the Pasighat High school.

The tribal people including the headmen saw the A.P.O., and pressed for acceptance of their two demands.

A news item in the *Assam Tribune*, June 26, 1956.

UNNECESSARY PLEADING

On the eve of the transfer of power made by the British, when India's Prime Minister Sri Jawaharlal Nehru took up the office of the Prime Ministership putting aside the cherished Presidential *gadi* built with the blood of the Indian masses, people were naturally led to believe that the former office was much more desirable than the latter. At that time the Indian political circle could apprehend it clearly that in the sphere of party-politics even the Congress-nominated Prime Minister could dance to the tune of the Rashtrapatis inclining. Although the title of the Rashtrapati has altogether later on changed into that of Congress President, yet however the power and prestige of the Congress President has remained undiminished. That is why perhaps the dark horse in the Indian politics Sri Dhebar who leads a very simple and unsophisticated life has accepted with eagerness the chair of the Congress President relinquishing the chair of the Chief Minister of his State. Much in the same way when Sri Mohendra Mohan Chowdhury assumed the overous responsibility of the Assam Congress Presidentship by relinquishing his office of Minister for Publicity, Government of Assam, we felt happy and satisfied at the thought that there is still no dearth of persons with patriotic fervour and selfless service in this state of Assam. By dint of his selfless devotion to duty he has got a lift to the General Secretaryship of the present All India Congress giving thereby Assam a higher place in the political sphere of India. That the people of Assam feel delighted to have seen him receive this high position of honour and prestige, there is no doubt about it. But however, soon after the assumption of this new office, we are afraid, that, he has being one of the political big guns of India forgetting that he is an Assamese to the marrow. It is known to Sri Choudhury that Assam is lagging far behind the other States of the Union in matters of progress and development. Our State is the only land in India which has been divided into several parts by people of other states according to their own respective needs. In this context we can safely recall the event that took place during the Shadullah Ministry when as a result of the enactment of the 'Grow More Food' law the land had been placed entirely at the disposal of the letters and

how it told heavily upon the economy of the State and also the present situation which arises out of the influx of refugees from East Pakistan to Assam even when the country has shaken off the shackles of alien rule. If this influx of refugees were to go on unchecked there is every chance for the Assamese people to lose what they call their own at present. Now, it is difficult for the Assamese people to pose themselves as Assamese by recovering their lost lands. In view of this, if the Assamese people fail to preserve their age old literature and culture, their very entity will surely be swept away by the turbulent currents of time. Keeping in view the urgency of the situation the patriots of Assam should be on their guard and do their level best to preserve their own literature and culture. It is for this reason that the Assamese public have observed the other day, the 'Assamese Language Day' organised under the auspices of the Asam Sahitya Sabha in the N.E.F.A. in order to preserve their entity. We do not know, of course, what inconvenience he has seen in the efforts of the Assamese people, but it is undoubtedly a piece of sophistry on the part of Sri Chaudhury and for that matter a disgrace too to the people of the State as a whole, for what he had said as president in the inaugural function of the Hindi Training Centre at Gauhati immediately after the assumption of his new office. He said—"It is a matter to be given serious thought as to whether our demand for the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction in the N.E.F.A. areas is at all based on grounds of fairness and feasibility. Because, in the Hill Areas alone there are in use 27 different languages. On the other hand many of the non-Assamese people living in Assam have to learn the Assamese language or in other words the Assamese Literature, is yet to reach their hearts. In such circumstances, the adoption of only one resolution and the delivery of speeches will cut no ice in so far as the spread of the language is concerned."

Can there be anything more ridiculous for the people of Assam? Anyhow, we want to call this statement of Sri Choudhury an 'absurd strange discovery,' for we do not know whether he had even been to the N.E.F.A. (the possibility of his not going there is greater).

Nevertheless he says in his statement that 27 languages (dialects) are prevalent in the N.E.F.A. Areas alone. If that

be so then through which medium the instruction will have to be imparted is the question. May we ask if the Constitution of India ignore the regional language? Sri Choudhury is not aware of the fact perhaps that prior to the imposition of Hindi by the Government concerned the people of these tribal areas had communicated their thoughts and feelings in Assamese. In the other day's issue of this paper we published reports of protest voiced by the plains tribal people against the imposition of Hindi on them in a public meeting held for the purpose in the N.E.F.A. in observance of the Assamese Language Day in N.E.F.A. on June, 7 last. We also draw the attention of Sri Choudhury to the resolution adopted in the meeting. After a great deal of deliberation they had finally adopted a resolution to the effect that they have been communicating their thoughts and feelings through the medium of Assamese from the ancient time. It is also said that most of the tribal people have forgotten their own dialects on account of their long and constant association with the language. Under the circumstances, it will not only be unreasonable but also unfair and unjust if Hindi is to be imposed upon the people of N.E.F.A., instead of Assamese. It is not difficult to understand why Mr. Chaudhury has, in spite of the expressed desire of our tribal brethren to retain Assamese as the medium of instruction, has pleaded for the retention of Hindi.

* The Editorial of the weekly Asamiya, June 23, 1956 Reproduced by courtesy.

LEST THERE BE MISGIVINGS AND MISAPPREHENSIONS !

By Sripeecee

There has been so much talk about the Iron Curtain instituted by the N.E.F.A. authorities for the 'weighty' consideration of good and effective administration of a strategically important area and too much enthusiasm to know about happenings inside the tribal areas has been openly discouraged (vide Prime Minister's statement at Lok Sabha). But somehow or other, certain informations manage to percolate through the so-called iron-railings and they tend to create misgivings and misapprehensions in the public mind. Here are some such disturbing reports emanating from beyond the Inner Line:

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Obviously with a view to retaining the indigenous habit and traditions of the tribal people, sale and/or purchase in the N.E.F.A. markets of other sorts of clothings viz. those worn by Assamese or Bengali, are reported to have been strictly forbidden. But Hindi Films, that are being exhibited there are naturally full of customs which in no way come for co-herece with the Administration's plea for retention and encouragement of indigenous habits and traditions.

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There are reports of debarring by the N.E.F.A. authorities of dramatic performances, arranged on festive occasions by Assamese residents in collaboration with the tribal people within N.E.F.A. territories. Even playing of musical instruments in private houses is reported to have been sternly resisted. The same fate is also reportedly met with even in the matter of playing Nam Kirtan. But Hindi Cinemas with all their relative

paraphernalia continues to be an unavoidable means of recreation, as also propaganda. Such an affair smacks of bad taste, incongruity and deliberate attempt on the part of the Administration to resist any endeavour by Assamese residents to foster and develop amity with their tribal brethren.

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Such intermixing of the tribal people with the Assamese is thought undesirable for reasons known to the powers that be. But systematic *manoeuvrings* were stated to have been there (and possibly not abandoned yet) to depute tribal students of N.E.F.A. to Rajasthan. This preference of Rajasthan, over all others, as a resort for higher education is difficult to understand.

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A very high N.E.F.A. official, so goes a report, in course of inspection of schools recently undertaken, issued a verbal 'fatwa': *jo Hindi nahi sikhega, nukri se clag kar donga*. Comment is unnecessary.

* * *

There have been Seminars on the teaching and propagation of Hindi. Cheap propaganda films are exhibited on the plea of Rastrabhasa Prachar, stipends are liberally offered for training in Hindi. Apparently these are commendable attempts for propagation of Hindi; but they go counter to the Prime Minister's reply to a query in the Lok Sabha by Sri Hem Barua, to the effect that there would be no imposition of Hindi and over-enthusiasm about Hindi Prachar is to be deprecated. And what passes one's comprehension is the systematic attempt on the part of the N.E.F.A. Administration to oust Assamese from its age-old natural position. Apart from official circulars being issued in this regard, it is learnt that the Political Officers and Assistant Political Officers would engage (even on Pay Roll?) propagandists, who would publicise, "Tribal brethren, you must learn Hindi for your welfare and development. There is no use learning Assamese. You must remember that only those knowing and speaking Hindi will be employed in Government Service." It further transpires that members of the tribal communities would be persuaded and lured by loaves and fishes of office and even coerced to propagate the use of Hindi. Could

there be more glaring instances of downright exploitation of these simple, unsophisticated people ?

* * *

In the schools of N.E.F.A., so goes another report, maps with Assamese inscriptions were previously used. One fine morning, however, all these maps were withdrawn and replaced—after a total map-less gap of good many days—by maps with Hindi inscriptions. Where Maps in Hindi are not possible, maps with marking in English would be used. Even then, Assamese maps would not be used. What would an unbiassed mind surmise over this ?

* * *

Persons, particularly for the Education Department in N.E.F.A., recruited from outside Assam, are not necessarily required to learn the local tribal dialects, so says a report. Only Assamese teachers are obliged to be conversant with as many dialects as possible. The result is that about 80% of the Assamese teachers and officers are conversant with the local dialects, whereas others are not.

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Even then, those coming from outside would be paid much higher emoluments, afforded better amenities. In many such cases, it is reported, requisite qualifications would be relaxed. But the case is just the opposite in respect of the Assamese teachers and officers. They are paid less, their appointing and service conditions are very strictly enforced and they are perpetually under apprehension of losing their jobs. Why this blatant discrimination and disparity ? We pause for a reply.

* * *

Only last year, in course of Adviser Dr. Elwin's visit to Tezu, a variety show was held in his honour and there, while presenting a musical item—a Hindi patriotic song—one tribal boy among the participating group, wore a 'gamocha' (an Assamese napkin) around his neck. A high official is reported to have taken, thereupon, the boy and the organisers to task over this wearing of *gamocha*. Quite a row ensued over this affair and ultimately at Elwin's intervention, a compromise was effected and the official made to apologise. Apparently, this is a very

small incident but not insignificant, because it exposes the biased attitude of officialdom against anything Assamese and also the anti-Assamese psychology of the officers there. But remember, the officer, at that time, was wearing trousers, coat, neck-tie and all that and he got the due rebuff over that.

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Of the 5 or 6 Political Officers not one belongs to Assam. And of the 10 or 15 Asst. P.O.'s, hardly 2 or 3 come from this area. A Director of Education, in place of the former Education Officer, who was a well qualified Assamese lady, was appointed last year from outside Assam. Even advertisements for all N.E.F.A. appointments are hardly seen in Assam papers. We only wish that the press reports about a latest Government 'policy' of totally debarring Assamese and Bengali from appointments in N.E.F.A. are untrue. What do all these mean?

* * *

Journalists, connected with Assam's Newspapers, have seldom been encouraged to undertake visits inside this 'forbidden territory', whereas frequent visits by Pressmen from Delhi, Bombay etc. are carefully planned and undertaken and, motivated reports by biased and dressed-up correspondents, as also travelogues often written in the name of wives of privileged officers, are given wide publicity in those newspapers. Perverted opinion is thereby sought to be created about the Assamese people—their narrow-mindedness, Assamisation, linguistic imperialism and all that. And the tragedy with Assam is the lack of proper publicity. Even rejoinders to those motivated reports would not be published. So Assam's case goes by default.

* * *

Here we want to point out certain allegations of anti-Assamese bias exhibited by the N.E.F.A. officials in the Memorandum by the Asam Sahitya Sabha to the Assam Governor and the Union Home Minister, to which no contradiction, has so far come. And this only goes to justify our misapprehensions detailed above.